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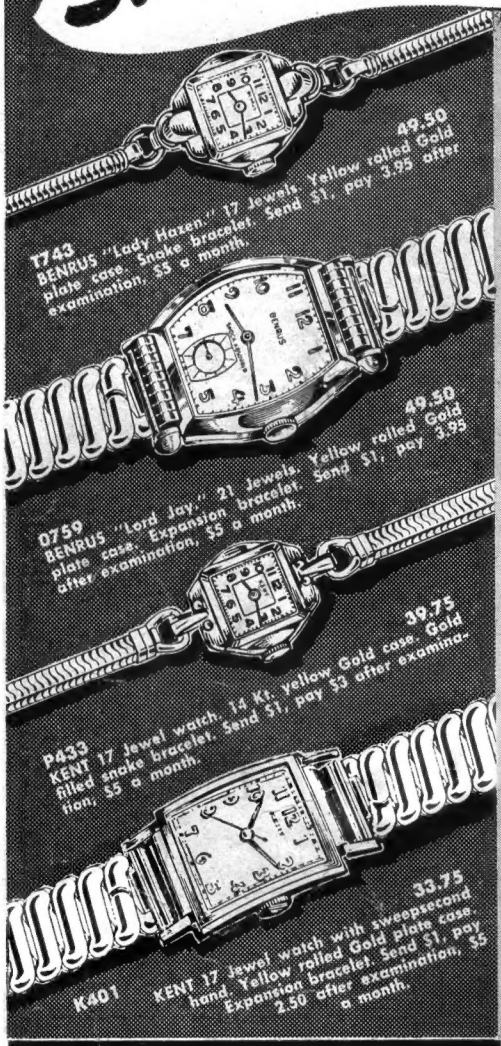

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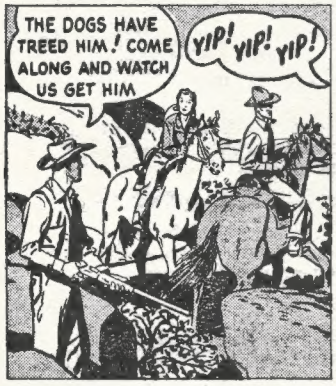

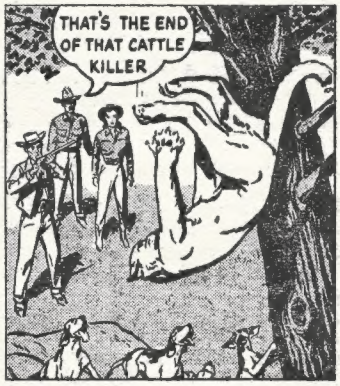

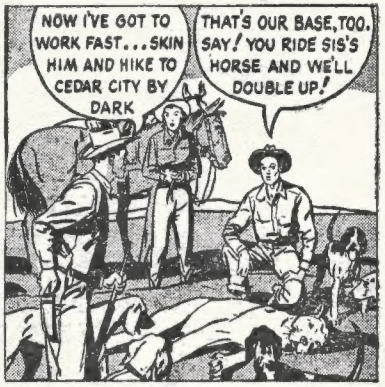

BLACK MASK

VOL. XXXI, No. 3 MAY, 1948

K. S. WHITE, *Editor*

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Cover painted for Black Mask by Peter Stevens

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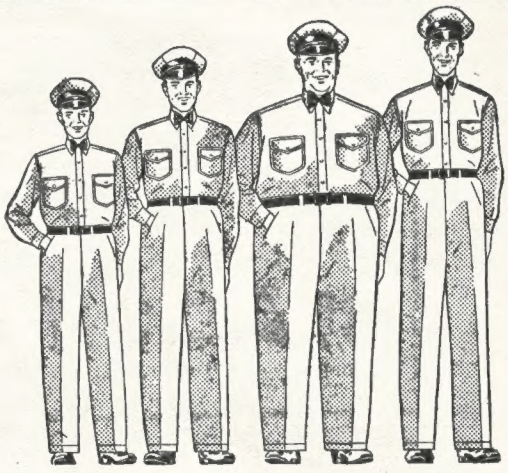

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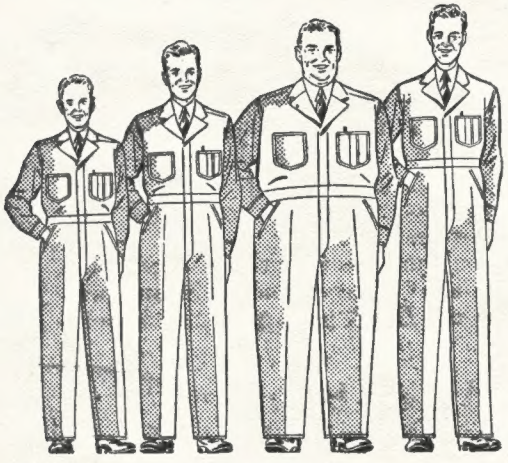

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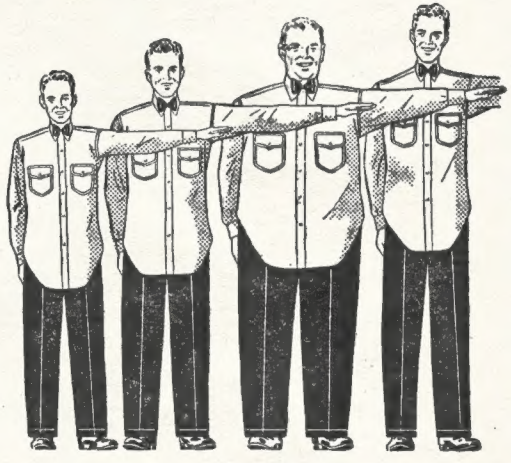

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And Manville Moon—*Mr.* Moon to you, if you don't want your ears pinned back and your features worked over by as competent a set of bare knuckles as any private op ever boasted (See *The Man Who Chose the Devil,* page 66 of this issue)—will be back again to give us—

A SHOT IN THE ARM

—in RICHARD DEMING'S newest excursion into the realms of hard-boiled cross and double-cross. How Moon became legally responsible for an adult incompetent with a penchant for hitting the needle and a personality that drew visitors with death in their eyes faster than syrup draws flies, was primarily a matter of economics. In other words, if Moon hadn't been stone broke he wouldn't have touched the Rand case with a ten-foot pole. But he didn't have a nickel to his name so, even though he knew better, he consented to wetnurse the dopey eyeful. He'd have been delighted to resign after the first kill but by that time he was up to his cauliflower ears in murder and had to see it through.

* * * *

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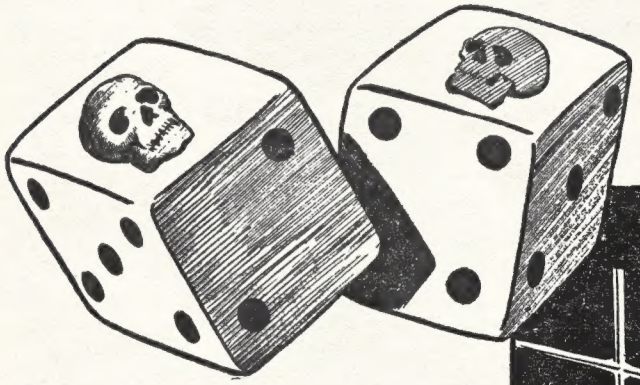


By

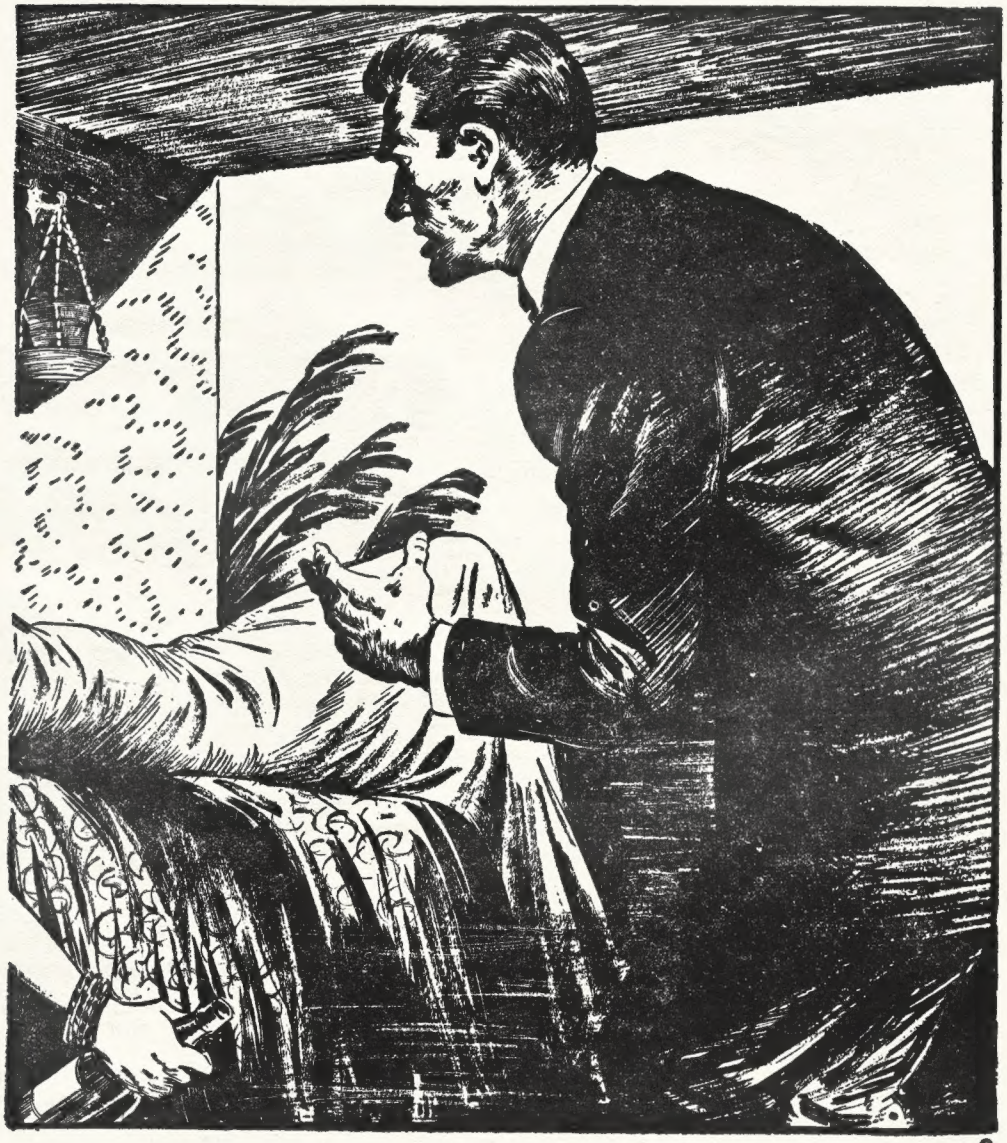
CURTIS CLUFF

I WAS lying face down chewing on a mouthful of dead leaves well-seasoned with dirt. At first I couldn't understand this since I am a rather finicky eater. I spat, raised myself on an elbow and felt the back of my skull. There didn't seem to be any fracture but I could count on a sore head for a couple of days. I got out my pocket flash, found my hat and adjusted it gingerly over the rapidly swelling goose egg. The envelope was gone from my pocket and something else had taken its place, something wrapped in my own handkerchief. I opened the handkerchief in the beam of the flashlight and saw that they had kept to their part of the bargain. Too bad they had been so heavy-handed about it. I was going to make them regret it if I could.

My movements hadn't disturbed her—nothing would ever disturb her again.

NEVER DIE RICH

Ah, Waikiki! The Isles of Romance, waving palms, ukuleles softly playing—but the golden sands were washed with crimson, and for Betty Hart it was the last *aloha*.



I stared down at the gold cigarette case and a woman's ring sporting a blue-white diamond large enough to choke a python. The stone in the ring could have been switched, but I doubted it. The engraving checked; both articles bore the three-word legend: *Betty from George*. I wrapped them again and shoved them down in my pocket. It was twenty minutes to one.

I wasted five more minutes looking around. Unfortunately, my late friends had neglected to leave any calling cards or telephone numbers. I followed the slanting path down through the shoulder-high *panicum* grass and out to the road. The night was as dark as ever and if there was anybody around I didn't see him. I walked down the road to my car and headed for Nuuanu Valley.

THIRTY or forty automobiles were parked in the sweeping semi-circular driveway and a stranger might have thought a fair-sized cocktail party was in progress. The front door opened as I reached the top step of the wide Southern-style veranda and a white tie and tailed butler bowed formally. He was a tall man in his late forties. He had a long grave face and the breadth of his shoulders wasn't tailor-made. If the occasion regrettably called for it, English Tommy, retired boxer and con man, still packed a punch. I had seen him throw it.

"Good evening, Mr. Ford. Haven't seen you in some time, sir."

"How's it going, Tommy?"

"Splendidly, sir."

I gave him my hat, walked into a spacious hall flanked by two large living rooms and stood in the doorway of the room on the left until I located my client. It wasn't difficult. I just picked out the largest knot of males, walked over to the group and there she was in the center of it. I caught her eye, grabbed a highball off a passing tray and went back to prop up the arch with my shoulder.

Mrs. Hart eased out of the group and came toward me. She was wearing an ivory satin strapless gown that looked as though she had gotten into it with the aid of a shoehorn and then stepped overboard to make it cling properly. It did cling properly. She had a clear skin, wide disbelieving brown eyes, and she wore her rather full lips in an amused pout. Betty Hart knew her assets and she was proud of them.

"Did we win?"

"Mission accomplished." I reached for my pocket.

"Not here. Aren't you going to take me home?"

I nodded. "I want to run up and see Manny for a few minutes. Mind waiting?"

She shook her head.

"Where's Bartin?"

"Over there in the corner."

"You been with him all evening?"

"He hasn't been out of my sight."

I finished my drink and handed her the empty glass. "Don't run away."

She made a cross-my-heart gesture and her smile held out a different kind of promise. I managed to get my eyes off her and headed for the polished oak stairway.

The slim young man at the head of the stairs wore a white dinner jacket, a rod under his left arm and a mouth with a starboard sag. Eyes with more life in them could be found at any taxidermist's.

"What's new, shamus?"

"Manny in there?"

He nodded. "You'll find *Mister* Madieros in his office."

I grinned and pushed through the door.

The large softly-lighted room was

given over to what are euphemistically known as games of chance and these ranged from roulette to fan tan. There weren't any ugly boys in here, unless you considered the one behind the peephole in the oil painting of Queen Liliuokalani. At the far end, Manny Madieros stood in the open doorway leading to his office. He spied me as I worked my way down the room and his seldom-used smile looked more like a grimace of pain.

"Long time no see, Johnny. Come on in." He led me into the office and shut the door.

I sat on the low beige leather sofa and watched the trim, elegantly-tailored little gambler cross to the built-in bar. "Still stealing from the blind, Manny?"

"We clip a widow or an orphan occasionally. Nothing big." He did things with a squat pinch-bottle, handed me my glass and leaned against the desk. "How's the racket?" he asked solemnly.

This opening ritual was performed on each of my infrequent visits to Manny and I shrugged the proper reply. "It's a living."

"Any time you want to change your mind and come in with me—" He watched my grin forming and scowled into his glass. "What's on your mind, Johnny?"

"What do you know about Mrs. Elizabeth Hart, Manny?"

He peered at me over his drink. "Background?"

"Anything you've got."

He put down his drink and folded his arms. "She used to be married to a New York importer with plenty of green stuff. Divorced him a couple years back and a sympathetic judge gave her a grand a week alimony. The ex-husband thought that was too much and hired more lawyers and private dicks to do something about it. He didn't have any luck but when she started finding private snoops in her breakfast cereal she decided it was time to clear out. Came to Honolulu about a year ago. She's good-looking, as you've probably noticed, she likes a good time and she drinks too much. Not choosey about her friends, but she's a good customer out here. That what you want?"

"It's about what I already know."

"Mind a little advice, Johnny?"

I looked at him in surprise. "Shoot."

"If your interest in Betty Hart is personal, my advice is to forget her. She's a man-eater."

I grinned. "She gave me the impression of being a one-man woman—one man at a time, that is."

Manny grinned back at me. "Then you haven't fallen for her."

"Strictly business—so far." I emptied my glass, crossed to the bar and helped myself to more Scotch, skipping the water and ice. It seemed to be the medicine indicated for my still-throbbing head.

I TURNED back to face Manny. "Last night, Mrs. Hart was out here with Larry Bartin. They left around midnight and went to Bartin's house in Waikiki, driving her car. At three A.M. she left Bartin's house driving alone. When she go to the Lewers and Kalakaua intersection and stopped for the traffic light, another car pulled up beside hers and two men got out holding handkerchiefs over their faces. One held a gun on her and the other came around and got in the car. He took a diamond ring off her finger, a gold cigarette case out of her bag and didn't touch the money in the bag or the pearls she was wearing. As they were leaving, the one standing beside her

said: 'Don't call the police. We'll get in touch with you.' She was so scared she couldn't even tell what kind of car it was, much less read a license plate.

"She went back to Bartin's and was all for calling the cops until Bartin pointed out they had taken only the two items and persuaded her that the gunman probably meant what he said. Whether this helpfulness on Bartin's part means anything, I haven't figured out yet. Anyway, she went home without calling any law because she was afraid the press wires would pick it up and give her ex-husband's lawyers more ammunition. She came to me this morning because all of a sudden she didn't trust Larry Bartin."

Manny smiled. "Now she's showing some sense."

I shrugged. "I told her there wasn't anything to do but wait and I agreed to act as go-between if they offered to sell. I also told her to stick with Larry Bartin as much as possible until something broke. If he was mixed up in it, we might be able to work out an angle.

"They called her this afternoon. I was O. K. as the go-between and the price was five thousand to be paid as they directed. She turned the money over to me and I took it up in the hills back of Woodlawn at midnight. I wasn't carrying a gun and the instructions were that I couldn't use my flashlight after I left the road. It was dark as the inside of an eight-ball and I was following a narrow path more or less by instinct when I got sapped from behind. When I came to, I found they had carried out their part of the bargain. The money was gone but I had the ring and the case in my pocket." I stopped talking.

My throat was dry and my head still ached so I poured some more Scotch into my glass. "Any ideas?"

Manny finished his drink and moved over to the bar thoughtfully. "What makes you think the job was fingered from here?"

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to."

"The finger man could just as easily have been a customer as an employe. If Bartin is not mixed up in it, it's practically certain somebody started the ball rolling from here last night."

"What about Bartin?"

I shrugged.

"You hired to catch the crooks?"

"I doubt it."

"What's your angle? You got the stuff back."

"I took that money up to Woodlawn as a hired hand. Somebody sapped me when there wasn't any need for it. The hundred bucks I earned isn't enough to get blackjacked for."

"So now you want to work for nothing."

"So now I want to get my hands on the guy who sapped me," I corrected.

Manny ran a hand over his sleek head and scowled.

I said: "What's the matter?"

"Remember Phyllis Bauer getting bumped off about six months ago?"

I thought I knew what was coming. "Sure. It was never pinned on anybody."

"Remember where she was killed?"

I nodded. "At the same Lewers and Kalakaua intersection. It bothered me but there isn't any possible connection that I can see." I grinned. "I decided not to point out the coincidence to Mrs. Hart until I got her stuff back. I was afraid she'd think I ought to solve a six-months-old murder case as well."

Manny's face wore a peculiar look. "Probably you didn't know that Phyllis Bauer left here that night with Larry Bartin."

I stared at him. "Let's talk some more about Phyllis."

Manny lit a cigarette and frowned at it. "She worked here for a couple of months."

"I know."

"I had her around strictly for atmosphere but," Manny grimaced, "I caught her snagging suckers away from the women they came with and bringing them up to the tables after she got them drunk. She'd help the guy play and palm his chips when he wasn't looking. Then she'd get some other sucker to cash the chips for her."

"Nice clean-cut kid."

Manny grinned. "After I threw her out she went to work for Julian Ranke. It was more her type of work."

I had seen Julian Ranke around. An interior decorator when he bothered to work at it, he was popular with wealthy women of uncertain age because he knew all the backstairs gossip and regaled them with it in his whinneying, high-pitched voice. Their husbands tolerated him because he could always provide girls from his private list and a case of bonded liquor at a moment's notice—also at a price. He got a kickback on the expensive presents to his girls and from liquor dealers, night clubs, hotels and caterers as well.

Manny said: "Ranke was here that night with a party. Phyllis was one of the girls he brought along."

"Was Larry Bartin along with them that night?"

"He was around. I don't think he was with the party. Maybe Madge remembers." He flipped the intercom switch. "Tommy, ask Madge to come up." He snapped off the switch and offered me a cigarette. "This is a personal favor, Johnny. I wouldn't want it to get around."

I NODDED and studied him as he lit the cigarettes. Manny was getting gray and the lines in his face were deeper than ever. The fact that he was deeply in love with Madge O'Neill but still legally tied to the pathetic Julia Madieros hadn't helped him get any younger. Julia had been the victim of a horrible auto accident a dozen years ago and her mind had snapped under the physical agony. She was in a mental institution somewhere in California and there was no hope for her recovery. Manny knew there was no hope but his deep unreasoning sense of loyalty wouldn't let him get a divorce. Manny's attitude only made Madge love him all the more. To further complicate their affairs, I had heard that Madge was doing her best to mother a recently-orphaned kid sister who had come out from Columbus and enrolled in the local university this past fall. Kathy, the kid sister, didn't know about Madge and Manny.

The door opened and Madge O'Neill walked to Manny with the grace of a jungle cat, the curves of her long shapely legs and boyish hips plainly outlined beneath the flowing crimson velvet evening dress. As she reached Manny's side, I applauded. She turned, startled.

I grinned. "Every time I see you walk across a room, I want to do that."

She flushed with pleasure. "One of the nicest compliments I ever had, Johnny Ford. Where in the world did you drop from?"

Manny handed her a drink. "You remember the night Phyllis Bauer came out with the Ranke party?" he asked abruptly. "The night she was bumped off?"

The color left Madge's face. "Are you interested in that, Johnny?"

"Just curious."

"What do you want to know?" she asked in a low voice.

"Who was in Ranke's party that night?"

"I didn't know any of them except Ranke and Phyllis Bauer. They were the usual two-weeks Hawaiian tour crowd. I didn't know any of the girls by name."

"Was Phyllis acting peculiar in any way?"

"Her usual charming self. She high-hatted the help, she picked a fight with one of the men in her party and when Ranke tried to calm her down, she turned on him. She finally ditched them and left with Larry Bartin. The Ranke group left a few minutes later."

"You hear where she was going with Bartin?"

Madge glanced quickly at Manny and away again. "I overheard Larry telling somebody he was planning a little Friday the Thirteenth party at midnight. I suppose they went to his house."

I looked at Manny. "I don't remember the cops ever tracing Phyllis to Larry Bartin's house."

"They don't know she was with Bartin at all."

"She was seen leaving here."

"You know any private citizens who would admit seeing her?"

"Have you been talking to Betty Hart?" Madge asked suddenly.

"What makes you ask that?"

"When I left downstairs, Mrs. Hart was being very mysterious and saying she knew something about the 'Bauer Case' the police didn't know. At least, that's what I gathered. I also gathered she was quite tight."

I stared at her, noticed that Manny was motionless, also eyeing her. I said: "That Scotch sneaks up on you. I think I'm a little tight, myself. Thanks for everything, Manny." I headed for the door.

Manny nodded slowly and didn't try to restrain me. I wasn't sure I liked that. I closed the door softly and pushed through the crowded gambling room with the feeling that something was out of focus besides my eyes. I nodded to the blond torpedo at the head of the stairs and hurried down.

Betty Hart was where I left her but this time she was seated alone on the sofa, frowning into her glass. There was another full drink on the table beside her. She smiled uncertainly, picked up the full drink and offered it. "I was beginning to think you'd deserted me. I kept ordering a double one of these things and when you didn't come back I drank them."

I sampled the drink. It was a double one all right. "Where's Bartin?"

"He left when I told him you were going to take me home."

"Where's everybody else?"

She waved a hand vaguely. "They sort of wandered off. Maybe I'm not very popular any more." She peered to see if I agreed.

I said: "Let's get out of here."

I downed most of my drink, put it on the table and helped her to her feet. She stumbled and grinned like a naughty child. "It seems to be kind of drunk out tonight."

I grinned back at both of her and Tommy was holding my hat before I'd even decided to look for him. "Goodnight, Mrs. Hart, Mr. Ford. I hope we'll be seeing you both again soon."

"You probably will, Tommy." It was a meaningless remark and perhaps I only imagined his long face grew longer when I made it.

I wheeled the coupe out of the driveway and headed down the valley. I looked sideways at Betty and saw she was resting her head on the back of the

seat, eyes closed, her face wearing a slightly puzzled frown. I said: "You were telling all and sundry that you know something the police don't about an unsolved murder. Was that a smart thing to do?"

She sat up. "Did the luscious redhead tell you that? I saw her going upstairs."

"It's not important. What do you know about Phyllis Bauer's death?"

"Nothing, really. Somebody brought up the subject of the murder and I suddenly realized it happened on the same corner where I was robbed." She eyed me. "Why didn't you think of that?"

I shrugged. "Who brought up the subject?"

"I don't remember, but I must have looked startled because Larry asked me what the trouble was. I didn't want to tell about the robbery so I just mumbled that I had remembered something. Sue Dodson asked if it had to do with the Bauer case and I said of course not. But Dick Walters started to tease me and when Julian Ranke joined the group, Dick told him I was a mystery woman in the Bauer murder case. Then they all began teasing and the more I tried to deny it the more certain they became that I did know something."

"Is that when you started to get unpopular?"

She hesitated. "Some of them seemed to be a little piqued. They did drift away soon afterwards."

"What about Bartin? Did he drift away soon afterwards?"

"When I told him you were coming down for me, he didn't appear unhappy to leave. Say, what is this, anyway?"

"It's not very smart to seem to know too much about a killing while the murderer is still running around loose."

She slid over closer to me. "Do we have to talk any more about murders?"

"Definitely not," I said. "I don't care much for the subject, either."

"Do you think it's more than just coincidence," she asked perversely, "both happening on the same corner, I mean?"

"Why borrow trouble? We got your stuff back." I felt her eyes on me but she didn't say any more.

CHAPTER TWO

Murder Gets Set

I TURNED off Waialae Avenue and shifted into second for the long, steep climb up Wilhelmina Rise. I had no time for conversation during the next few minutes. I was too busy wondering whether my asthmatic coupe was going to keep on trying or just say to hell with it and roll back down the hill. I parked in the slanting car-length driveway and we went into the dark house.

She found the switch and lights blazed in the entrance hall and living room beyond. "Make all the noise you want. Tatsue isn't here."

"Who's Tatsue?"

"My maid. She sleeps on the place but I let her go to Kauai to visit relatives for the weekend."

"Oh?" I inquired brightly.

"Kitchen's through there, Johnny. Want to get the ice cubes out while I powder my nose?" She turned off down the hall before I got a chance to answer.

I shrugged and crossed the living room which looked a little like Penn Station with culture, pushed into the kitchen and turned on the light.

I eyed the props resting on the white sideboard and grinned. A wide circular tray of monkey-pod wood held a silver bowl for ice cubes, a silver pitcher, a barely tapped fifth of Black Label and

two tall glasses. I wondered where she kept her etchings.

I got out ice cubes, filled the pitcher with water and carried the load back to the living room. I put it down on the coffee table, made a couple of fairly stiff drinks and decided it wouldn't be polite to start drinking. I took the cigarette case and ring out of my pocket and was polishing them with my handkerchief when she returned. I handed them to her.

"*Merci, Monsieur.*" She switched on a standing lamp beside the sofa, held the ring up to the light and looked inside it. She tried it on and it semed to fit nicely. She glanced at the cigarette case, tossed it on the table and picked up the drink tray. "Open the door for me, Lord Graystoke, and let's have our drinks on the *lanai.*"

I crossed to the solid glas wall, pulled back the sliding doors and followed her onto the balcony *lanai.* She put the tray on a drink table in front of a wide *hikiee* and handed me my drink. We clinked glasses, drank, and then both made faces. I had been decidedly heavy-handed in mixing them. Betty shrugged and sat on the *hikiee* and I wandered over to the balustrade to look at the view—and realized immediately that the view constituted Betty Hart's etchings. The *lanai* was almost two stories above the sharply sloping hill. Far out in the Pacific, a ship's running lights became part of the pattern of low-hanging stars and off to the right, the downtown area was a chiaroscuro of clashing neon held to earth by a net of badly strung yellow pearls that were street lights. I turned and looked at Betty.

I could see that she was smiling and I thought she was eyeing me rather intently. The latter could have been wishful thinking, of course. She shifted as though she had to make room for me on the six by nine foot *hikiee* and I went over and sat beside her.

She said: "Do you think Larry Bartin had anything to do with my being robbed?"

"Yes and no."

"That's a good answer. What does it mean?"

"I checked with Detective Lieutenant Walter Chun after you left my office. They haven't got a thing on him. Chun thinks he's some kind of remittance man who wouldn't be above a little genteel blackmail if the opportunity presented itself. But I can't see Bartin as part of a gang of professional criminals."

"Where does that leave us?"

I took another pull at my drink. "It would make sense if a gang of smart operators knew Bartin's reputation for playing around and used him as a sort of stalking horse either with or without his knowledge. They could be reasonably sure that none of his women friends would ever go to the police."

"You're pretty smart to figure all that out."

"Thank you. Nobody under six years old could have done it."

"You're too modest."

"My favorite flower is the shrinking violet."

"No, I mean it." Somehow she had slipped under my arm. I looked down at her. Her face was turned up to mine and she seemed to have lost interest in what we were discussing. "What are you waiting for?"

I didn't know myself so I kissed her.

Her arms crept around my neck and her body clung to me. It was a long kiss—so long I began to get dizzy. I put my hands on her shoulders and pushed her away from me. Her eyes were closed and her head wavered unsteadily in the

dim light. I stood up and I was still dizzy. She was sitting upright now, her hands down by her sides, gripping the edge of the *hikiee*. Her face was indistinct and when I bent toward her, I swayed and went down to my hands and knees. I said: "Mother always told me there would be days like this." Suddenly the floor came up and banged my chin and I rolled over.

"Johnny!"

"The whiskey—" I mumbled. It was all I managed to get out before blackness engulfed me for the second time that night.

THE sun was hot on my face, torturing my eyeballs through sensitive lids. I was sweating and my head felt as though somebody was twisting a cane knife in my skull. I opened my eyes cautiously and squinted against the brilliance of the sky. My arm twitched and my fingers closed on soft satin. I rolled my head tentatively—and landed on my feet in a single convulsive leap.

My movements hadn't disturbed Betty Hart. Nothing would ever disturb her. Her face was mottled above the dark bruises on her throat, ugly blue-green splotches where thumbs had sunk in. Her right hand gripped the empty whiskey bottle; the other lay palm outward on her chest as though to protect herself from a blow.

The *lanai* reeked of Scotch whiskey. The wooden tray had fallen to the floor, glasses were overturned. Even so, it didn't look as though much of a struggle had taken place. I held my watch up to my ear. It was still running and the time was three-thirty in the afternoon. Somewhere I heard a kid yell that a bicycle belonged to him. A little girl bellowed with rage at this.

I went into the house, began at the rear and worked my way back to the *lanai*. I didn't know what I was looking for and I didn't find it. The outer doors were locked and all the windows had screens nailed to the sills. The only exception was the open glass door leading to the *lanai*. Here, there was a fifteen foot drop to the ground. But the bolt hadn't been set on the kitchen door and a dime store skeleton key could have opened it.

The bottle I had used to mix the drinks had been replaced by another. The tax stamp was torn differently on this one but I'd never be able to prove it and my prints might be on this one, too. I pried it out of her hand, put it on the wooden tray along with the glasses, pitcher and bowl and carried them to the kitchen. I washed and dried everything, left them on the draining board and returned to the *lanai*. I stared down at her for the last time. I knew I hadn't killed Betty Hart but I also knew I could swing from an Oahu rope before the real murderer was caught. I went back to the living room, found my hat and let myself out of the house.

I backed my car out of the driveway, drove to my Waikiki apartment and parked around the corner. I hurried up the outside stairway, unlocked the door, stepped inside and shot the bolt, and made a rapid tour. For the present, I was alone.

I got out of my clothes, took a shower and shaved. It helped a little. I padded into the kitchen, broke out a fresh bottle of Scotch and took a long pull straight from the bottle. It hit bottom like a lump of jagged coral and stayed there. I took another drink and the first one loosened up a bit. I went back to the bedroom and got into some fresh clothes. I dug a gladstone out of the closet and

packed rapidly, including everything I had taken off just to be on the safe side. I got the .38 automatic, its shoulder rig and a box of cartridges out of the top bureau drawer. I decided to leave the .32 where it was under the shirts. If I had any official visitors I didn't want to give the impression I was skipping the Islands. I strapped the bag, picked it up and got out of the apartment. I stopped at the nearest drive-in and had a couple of hamburgers and a coke. Gradually the tension eased and the hard knots in my jaw began to loosen. But I still didn't love the human race very much.

I drove down King to the center of town, left the coupe in a parking lot and lugged my bag down a side street to a flophouse that masqueraded as a hotel. I registered as Allan Cory, Los Angeles, and allowed myself to be led to a musty, airless room by an ancient spike-haired Japanese who could have made a fortune playing in Boris Karloff movies. I opened the only window and stared across the alley at a restaurant kitchen. The cooking smells wafting upward were pretty bad but it was better than suffocating.

I took off coat, tie, shoes and trousers and stretched out on the bed still wearing the shoulder holster. I felt more comfortable with it on. I stared up at the cracked ceiling and tried to get some answers. I was still trying when I fell asleep.

Even the optimistic early morning sun couldn't make Grove Street picturesque. It limped along for only three blocks, then stumbled over its own dead end and sprawled in a twisted jungle of rusty auto parts and tin cans. Tufts of grass shouldered through cracks in the asphalt and the houses were identical, two-story boxlike slatterns.

Number 104 was three houses from the end and seemed aloof in its neat self-respect. Its battleship gray with white trim had been applied within the past couple of years. Sweetpeas and four-o'clocks elbowed each other in front of the porch and the three broad wooden steps were neatly painted and scrubbed.

I EYED the old couple sitting protectively close together on the narrow porch and waited. In spite of the gray in her hair, the out-sized plumpness of her figure and the not incongruous bare brown feet, Lani Bauer retained many signs of the natural grace and beauty that had been her daughter's. Gustave Bauer was Lani's physical opposite. Watery gray eyes were dull in a narrow face and a nicotine-rusted moustache followed the drooping line of his mouth. He smoked European-fashion, cigarette centered and drooping, eyes narrowed against the curling smoke. He spoke harshly and plaintively through the cigarette.

"You police, it is the same thing over and over again. Many times already we have told our story."

"He is not the police, poppa. He is a private detective."

I nodded. "My client wants to see that justice is done, Mr. Bauer. That's why he wants an independent investigation."

"And who is this client to whom justice is so important?" Bauer asked suspiciously.

"He doesn't want his name to come into it," I said. "It interests him and he wants to get to the bottom of it, if possible. That's all I can tell you."

Bauer lifted his gaunt body out of the chair. He removed the minute cigarette butt from his lips, flicked it over the railing and watched it fall. "I do not think I care to have the subject brought up again, Mr. Ford. If you will excuse me."

He limped to the door. "Come on, Lani."

"In a minute, poppa. I must say goodbye to Mr. Ford."

Bauer eyed the two of us, turned and hobbled into the house.

Lani continued to rock gently. "You must forgive poppa, Mr. Ford. It has been a bad time for both of us."

I leaned forward and picked up my hat. "Perhaps Mr. Bauer was right."

"No." She gestured me back to my perch on the rail. "You are a good man, Mr. Ford. I can see it in your face. I don't believe you would hurt us." She looked away from me, her round face sad. "Gustave is afraid. I am afraid too—of evil men who can kill openly and escape so easily."

"My client doesn't want to see them get away with it."

She shrugged helplessly. "We don't know anything we didn't tell the police. And if this new investigation brings out more that is ugly, who will it benefit? Not Phyllis—not us—not anybody."

"Perhaps there are other young girls."

"That is true," Lani nodded sadly. "Other young girls dreaming of beautiful clothes and parties and important men in big cars."

"What kind of work did Phyllis do, Mrs. Bauer?"

"Phyllis never talked to her mother and father." For the first time there was bitterness in her voice. "She arranged, how you call, 'deals' for businessmen. Very important deals which couldn't be talked about."

"Where did she work?"

"Not in any one place. Not in an office. Very often it would be at parties in evening clothes." Lani stared defiantly out into the street and I had the unhappy feeling she knew exactly what kind of person her daughter had been.

"Was she engaged, Mrs. Bauer, or did she see a lot of any one special fellow?"

"Not for a long time," she shook her head. "Years ago, there was young Walter Kirkland. We had hoped—" She raised her shoulders.

"What happened to young Kirkland?"

"Phyllis and Walter grew up together. We hoped some day they would be married. But three or four years ago they broke off." She smiled wistfully. "Walter was a very serious young fellow. If he had only been able to, as we Hawaiians say, 'letta go his blouse' a little more, maybe he could have understood Phyllis better and things would have been different." She shrugged resignedly and rocked back and forth in silence. "I thought maybe I was wrong when Walter called the night before she—died."

"The night before?"

She nodded. "When Walter called that night after so many years, I thought maybe they were going to get together again. But when I saw his face I knew it wouldn't be."

"Why was that?"

"Walter was very tense and he wouldn't come in. I called Phyllis and she came out here on the porch to talk. He was very *huhu* about something and Phyllis teased him."

"You don't know what he was angry about?"

"I didn't listen, Mr. Ford. I went upstairs and I could hear Walter's voice, very *huhu*. And Phyllis was laughing at him, teasing him like when they were children. Then I heard Walter's car drive away and Phyllis was still laughing."

"What sort of business is Kirkland in?"

"He works for the Fidelity Trust Company. Why do you ask that?"

I shrugged. "Have you seen him since that night?"

"No. He telephoned when he heard about Phyllis's death, but he said he was

flying to the mainland on business the same day and wouldn't get a chance to stop by."

"He's still on the mainland?" I asked hollowly.

"Oh, no. He was only gone about three weeks. I read about his return on the Clipper list in the paper."

"Did you tell the police about Walter's visit the night before Phyllis died?"

Lani Bauer looked at me in surprise. "Why should I embarrass Walter, Mr. Ford? He didn't know anything about my daughter's death. I told you—he came here the night *before* Phyllis died."

A cough sounded from the interior of the house and Lani turned her head. The cough was repeated and she smiled up at me. "I have to go in now." She stood up with a sigh. "I didn't want you to think we were hard and unfeeling. We are simple people, Mr. Ford, and we don't want to stir up more trouble. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly, Mrs. Bauer, and I appreciate your kindness in talking to me." I patted her plump arm gently, went down the steps and got into the coupe.

Ten minutes later I parked in front of a drug store, went in and dialed the Fidelity Trust Company. Walter Kirkland was out at the moment but was expected back before lunch.

CHAPTER THREE

Blackmail and Bullets

SUNLIGHT knifed through the Venetian blinds, laid an abstractionist pattern on the burgundy rug. I sat at the bare end of the mahogany dining table and watched Larry Bartin's practised gluttony without amusement. He was around forty and looked ten years younger. Unlined face, black hair silver-tipped in places and sardonic, wide-awake eyes. He was wearing silk pajamas and a bright red terry robe.

I watched a forkful of scrambled eggs and part of a shad roe disappear. "We were talking about Phyllis Bauer."

"I'm changing the subject, sailor." He indicated the morning edition at his elbow. "This looks bad. You were the last person to see her alive."

"The paper must have forgotten to mention that. Besides, Mrs. Hart's murderer was the last person to see her alive."

He wolfed a hot buttered biscuit and grinned at me. "Maybe we're both right, sailor."

"People get into trouble saying things like that."

Bartin's face grew sleepy. "Smitty!" he called sharply.

The kitchen door swung open revealing a pint-sized Filipino with the face of a mournful chimpanzee. He held a Colt revolver half as big as he was and the long barrel pointed straight at my head.

I said: "Put him back in the box. My breakfast hasn't settled yet."

Bartin grinned. "Go back in the kitchen, Smitty, but don't get too far from the door."

The Filipino's flat eyes said plainly that a killing would upset him almost as much as stepping on one of his kitchen "cocka-roaches." He lowered the big gun slowly and pulled the door shut. I ran a finger around the inside of my collar and stared back at Bartin. He was holding a pocket .32 automatic above the edge of the table. He flipped the safety off with his thumb, put it back in the pocket of his robe and kept his hand on it. "Just to be doubly sure you don't make any mistakes."

"You're jumping to a lot of conclusions."

"For instance?"

"That I had anything to do with Betty Hart's death or that I'm in any kind of a spot."

Bartin shrugged. "If you want me to forget you were with Betty, maybe we can make a deal. But it'll cost you something."

"Did you see me in her house?"

"You met her at Manny's and you took her home to turn her ring and case over to her. Did you forget I knew about the robbery, sailor?"

"The police don't have a record."

His face grew pensive. "They might be interested in knowing how you spent your time on the night of her death."

"It would be my word against yours. Maybe the cops would start poking into *your* after-hours amusements. Want to try it?"

"We seem to have reached an impasse. What did you come here for?"

"That robbery the police don't have any record of—it happened on the same corner where Phyllis Bauer was bumped off six months ago. The coincidence has begun to bother me."

His eyes were alert. "You named it—coincidence."

"Funny it happened so near here—and shortly after each woman had left your house."

"Who says Phyllis Bauer had just left my house?"

"I might be able to dig up a witness."

Bartin took a last sip of coffee and pressed the buzzer under the table with his foot. Smitty came in and began clearing the table. He didn't look at me. We sat in silence until the last dish had been removed and Smitty had retired to the kitchen. Bartin took a cigarette from the box on the table and pushed the box toward me: "Manny Madieros is a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"I know him."

"I don't recall that Manny volunteered any information about Phyllis to the police."

"Maybe Manny didn't tell me either."

There was confidence in Bartin's grin. "Ford, I wouldn't count on Manny backing you up on that story."

"Why not?"

He shrugged. "Manny's got quite an investment in that place of his. A murder case is not the kind of advertising he wants."

I sighed and rose. "You're not going to be much help. I'll have to do it the hard way."

"Don't go away mad. You've given me an idea."

"What kind of an idea?"

"Who are you working for, Ford?"

"That's a private matter."

Bartin grinned. "I'm sure it is. You're in a jam and you're not very happy about it."

"You were talking about an idea."

"I want to hire you."

"To do what?"

"To bring in the murderer of Phyllis Bauer and Betty Hart."

"You know who the murderer is?"

"No."

"What's your angle?"

"It doesn't do my reputation any good to have things happen to unescorted women near my home at regular intervals." He leaned forward. "But I'll expect you to clear up the case in a hell of a hurry."

I sat down slowly and eyed him. "It takes time to collect evidence in a murder case. You don't just pick out somebody on the street and say 'Tag, you're a murderer.'"

"Why not?"

I raised my eyebrows.

"You have a quick mind, Ford," he grinned. "I'm not squeamish and you can't afford to be."

"You got a sucker picked out?"

"Are you interested?"

I shrugged.

Bartin smiled his satisfaction. "Phyllis Bauer was, among other things, a blackmailer."

"Any proof?"

He jabbed a thumb at his chest.

"She was blackmailing you?"

He nodded.

"With what?"

"A photograph."

"What kind?"

"We won't go into that. She gave me the negative and all the prints she made of it on the night she was killed."

"Assuming there really was a photograph, am I supposed to believe she gave it to you of her own free will?"

Bartin grinned. "We'll take it from the beginning. A few years ago, Phyllis acquired a very fine miniature camera. She knew how to handle it, how to do her own developing and printing and so on."

"You mean she had one of those dinguses that fits in the end of a fountain pen?"

"Something like that. Except hers was fitted through the clasp of an evening bag. One day she showed me a picture she'd snapped at a party of mine. It could have gotten me into a lot of trouble so I took it away from her and tore it up. She reminded me she had the negative and that was the beginning for me."

"I'd like to know what was in that picture."

HE WAVED it aside. "Early on the night of her death, I went out to Manny's for a little roulette. Phyllis was there with a party of mainlanders that Julian Ranke had in tow. She got into a brawl with Ranke and came over to me, of all persons, and asked me to take her home. I pointed out I could see no reason for doing her any favors. She demanded to know if I was giving a party later in the evening. When I started to ignore her, she burst into tears and said nobody had ever understood her but me and that she had treated me very badly. She said if I'd take her to her house she'd get the negative and the prints she'd made and give them to me. Then if I was really nice I would invite her to my party. I knew she was tight, of course, but I couldn't afford to pass up the chance.

"I drove her to her house and when she came out, she insisted on driving her

own car over here. Since she still hadn't handed over the prints and I didn't want to have to take her home after the party anyway, I didn't argue with her."

I said: "The cops listed a gold evening bag among her effects but they didn't mention any concealed camera in it."

"The police would only have noticed the torn lining in the bag. Phyllis didn't exactly sober up at the party and she laid the bag down from time to time. One of those times, I took the opportunity to rip the camera out of the bag."

"What happened to the camera?"

"I didn't want it around. I threw it out with the garbage the next day."

"Was there any film in it?"

"As a matter of fact, there was."

"You destroy that, too?"

"No. I developed the film myself. I didn't make any prints but there were several pictures of the party and I thought it might be a good idea to have them under the circumstances. Self-defense, you know."

"I asked you if you had a fall guy picked out and you didn't answer the question. Does that mean you're considering somebody?"

"Do you know a man named Walter Kirkland?"

"No. Why?"

"I've found out he was once in love with Phyllis."

"So what?"

"Two days before her death, Phyllis telephoned to say she needed five hundred dollars and would be around with the negative at seven o'clock. That was her usual gag. But I had the money ready and shortly after seven o'clock the doorbell rang. I opened the door and a young man I'd never seen introduced himself as Walter Kirkland and said he was doing an errand for Phyllis who was unable to come. I invited him into the hall, gave him the money and opened the envelope. I saw, as usual, that Phyllis had doublecrossed me and sent a print instead of the negative, and I asked Kirkland how long he had been assisting Phyllis in blackmail.

"He looked startled and snatched the photograph out of my hands. He muttered something unintelligible and rushed out of the house. I didn't react until I realized he had taken both the picture and the money. I ran out to the street but he had already driven off."

"How did Phyllis explain Kirkland when you were with her the next night?"

"I never got a chance to ask her. I didn't want to say anything to make her change her mind about giving me the pictures and actually she didn't hand them over until we got back here. Guests had started to arrive and I didn't have another chance to talk to her privately until the party was over and all the other guests had left. By that time she was very tight and I decided to wait until the next day. Unfortunately, there wasn't any next day for Phyllis."

"You never made any attempt to contact Kirkland?"

"Kirkland hasn't made any effort to contact me. I'm almost satisfied that he was an innocent dupe and that he has destroyed the photograph. He's a sort of senior clerk at the Fidelity Trust Company, he's around thirty, a bit of an old maid in his habits and he hasn't had a steady girl since he stopped going with Phyllis several years ago. You look into it. If you agree that Kirkland fits, then he's our man."

"Where did you get your information about him?"

"I dug it up myself. It's been slow work because I wanted to be careful."

I picked up my hat. "I'll see you later."

"Are we going to work together?"

I grinned. "I'll talk to my board of directors and let you know."

It didn't seem to bother him very much. As I reached the door, he called: "Oh, Ford!"

I turned. He stared at me for a moment and a slow grin spread over his face. He waved a hand. "I just had another idea but it'll keep until you hear from your board of directors."

He was still grinning when I went out the door. He never had taken his other hand off the gun in his pocket.

IT WAS high tide and the sheltered water at the bay lapped at the edge of the rolling green lawn that surrounded Julian Ranke's spacious house. We were out on that lawn and I wasn't too comfortable under the hot mid-morning sun. Ranke, himself, was a fat gross Buddha reclining in the rattan lounge chair. He was wearing brief swimming trunks and had a towel wrapped around his massive head. Wide, pale eyes were magnified behind heat frosted glasses. I disliked him instinctively. He rattled the ice cubes in his nearly empty glass and there were crocodile tears in his voice.

"A dreadful thing, Mr. Ford. Haven't they any idea who did it?"

"If they do they're not telling. I've got an idea they think it's connected with the Bauer killing."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

I shrugged. "There are similarities in the two cases. Take the two women themselves. Phyllis was a chiseler and Betty Hart had a good private income, but both of them played the field, both were young and good looking and both drank too much."

"Did you know Phyllis extremely well, Mr. Ford?"

"I'd seen her. I hear you knew her pretty well, though."

Ranke had apparently developed a slight deafness. I raised my voice. "Phyllis was one of your party girls, wasn't she?"

Ranke looked pained. "I'm not quite sure I understand your meaning."

I didn't want to waste time playing ping-pong with words. "It's fairly common knowledge you make more money as a semipro host and super de luxe tourist guide than you do decorating interiors, Mr. Ranke. I mean you had Phyllis Bauer's telephone number."

Ranke reached the pitcher beside his chair with effort and poured himself more of the already mixed Tom Collins. "Are you deliberately trying to be unpleasant?"

I held out my glass. "I was hoping you could help me get some facts."

"Where did you get the idea I had any interest in Phyllis—aside from the fact that she was a charming girl and a delightful companion?"

I stirred the drink with my moderately clean finger. "Larry Bartin, for one."

"That gigolo!" Ranke exploded. "*He* was with Betty Hart the night she was killed! *He*—!" He stopped short and eyed me suspiciously.

I sucked on an ice cube and looked dumb. It wasn't a tough assignment. "I guess you must have seen them at Manny's."

He didn't say anything. I didn't have to open his skull to know he'd have been very happy to change the subject. I said: "You spend a lot of evenings at Manny's, don't you?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"You steer a lot of parties there."

Ranke's smile said he had found a way to change the subject. "You are a friend of Manny Madieros, aren't you?"

"A lot of people seem to think so. As a matter of fact, a private dick can only be so close to a gambler and still keep his nose clean."

"You look like a man who could appreciate a good joke."

"I've got a very peculiar sense of humor. If the joke is on me, it better be good."

"The joke has nothing to do with you, Mr. Ford, but I think you might be amused."

"I'm listening."

Ranke drank deeply and smacked his lips. "As you so bluntly stated, I do occasionally accept remuneration for helping others to entertain themselves. I've never seen why a person who has the special talent for bringing happiness and cheer into the lives of others shouldn't receive something for his pains. Recently, I have kept an accurate check on what my guests spend at Manny's. It turns out to be a not inconsiderable sum. It has occurred to me that Manny has never offered the slightest token of appreciation for my patronage. Yesterday, I decided it was time for a businesslike approach; I sent him a bill for twenty percent of what my guests lost the night before—a procedure I intend to follow in the future."

I stared at him blankly. "Are you serious?"

Ranke chuckled. "I'd hate to see his face when he gets the bill but it's only fair. Rather amusing, don't you think?"

"You expect Manny to think so?"

"Perhaps not, but he knows I can always take my patronage elsewhere."

"I can think of an angle that definitely won't amuse Manny."

"And what is that?"

"Blackmail."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"A woman named Betty Hart who happened to be murdered two nights ago —probably not long after leaving Manny's place."

"Oh, good Lord!"

I grinned. "Manny has a peculiar sense of humor, too."

Ranke absently rubbed the cool glass against his fat cheek. He shrugged. "Oh, well, it can easily be explained. I rather imagine I'll be hearing from him this afternoon."

"I rather imagine you will."

RANKE eyed me thoughtfully and his gaze wandered over to the garage where his good-looking butler had joined a burly individual in a chauffeur's uniform. I asked: "What was that argument you had with Phyllis Bauer at Manny's on the night of *her* death?"

Ranke's gaze returned to me. "Did Mr. Larry Bartin tell you about that, too?"

"Maybe. Is it true?"

"Did Mr. Larry Bartin also tell you that Phyllis left with *him* and went to *his* house and that it was *there* she was last seen alive?"

"Maybe. What was the argument you had with Phyllis?"

Ranke shrugged. "I guess it doesn't make any difference now. One of the guests gave Phyllis some money to exchange for chips. I saw her pocket most of it and buy chips with the rest. The gentleman could easily have afforded to lose the money but I simply couldn't permit Phyllis to take advantage of him in that fashion."

"So what happened?"

"I demanded she give me the money."

"Give *you* the money?"

"To return to the gentleman."

"Why didn't you make her buy chips with it or return it directly to the man?"

"Are you implying that I would have stolen the money?"

"Don't you usually split the take with your girls?"

"You are decidedly unpleasant, Mr. Ford."

"What happened to the money?"

"I don't know!" he shouted.

"You didn't get your cut?"

Ranke sat up abruptly. "Mr. Ford, you are abusing my hospitality."

Since he was staring at the glass in my hand and seemed to regret the drinks he had wasted on me, I got up, put the glass on the arm of the chair and reached for my back pocket. Two powerful hands gripped my arms from behind. I looked down at the large signet ring and recognized the manicured paws of Donald, the butler. I said: "Tell your flunkey to take his hands off me."

Ranke smiled up at me. "All right, Donald, you may release the gentleman."

The hands fell away. I turned and Donald stepped back with an ironic half-smile. He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man with wavy hair and a coat that was a trifle too tight around the hips. I turned back to Ranke, got out my wallet, extracted two one dollar bills and threw them in his lap. "Here's a couple of bucks for the drinks. You probably need it more than I do."

"Donald, Mr. Ford's hat, please! I don't ever want to see this man on my property again!" He was almost screaming.

I grinned and followed the silent Donald across the lawn and into the wide front hallway. He took his time crossing to the hall table and in the act of reaching for my hat, he paused and stared at his reflection in the mirror. It was more than I could take. I said: "Hurry it up, bud. You want me to be late for my dressmaker?"

His face paled. Slowly he turned and offered the hat. As my fingers touched it, he let it fall to the floor.

I said: "Be a little gentleman's gentleman. Pick it up and hand it to me."

He smiled rigidly.

I stepped around the hat. "Pick it up."

Donald's hands came up and caressed the lapels of his coat. It was sufficient warning that Donald knew his way around. I could never get my hands up before he smashed both fists into my face. Without changing expression I slammed my toe into his shin. He danced back and I put my weight behind a looping right to the teeth. He flailed backwards and landed on the floor in a sitting position. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth and his eyes were dazed.

I said: "Let's try it again. The hat. And don't get blood all over it, either."

He rose to his knees, used his breast-pocket handkerchief to dab at the blood on his mouth, picked up the hat and handed it to me.

I backed to the doorway. "Don't forget to look in the mirror before you go out. Your hair's a sight."

CHAPTER FOUR

Picture of Death

I EYED the imposing façade of the Fidelity Trust Building and decided I knew why such edifices were called temples of commerce. All this one needed was a steeple and a bell. I pushed through the revolving doors and walked down the carpeted center aisle to a semi-circular desk bearing a small sign which said with simple chromium-on-black-felt dignity: *Information.* The attractive dark haired girl behind the desk flashed me a dazzling smile of inquiry.

I stated my request and she used her

pencil to point discreetly at a slender man with a thin blond moustache on the other side of the marble barricade. I went over and leaned on the rail. The young man was smiling respectfully into a telephone and making notes on a memo pad. He spied me and gestured toward the swinging gate and the empty chair beside his desk. I went in and sat down.

He hung up, tore off the sheet and clipped it to a folder and signaled an office boy of sixteen or seventeen. "Davidson account. Mr. Potter wants to see it right away." The kid hurried off and he turned back to me. "What can I do for you, sir?"

I gave him one of my cards and he glanced at it smilingly. The smile disappeared and his lower lip crept between his teeth. "Why do you want to see me, Mr. Ford?"

"I'm interested in the death of the late Phyllis Bauer, Mr. Kirkland. I thought you might be able to help me."

His eyes swept swept nervously over my shoulder and around the big office. "Why do you think I can help you?"

"You used to know Phyllis. Is that enough to start with?"

The hand worrying my card trembled. "I'm afraid not. I hadn't seen her in years before she was killed."

"What about the night before her murder?"

He tried to chew his moustache. It was too short. "I guess the Bauers told you that. I did happen to be in the neighborhood for a few minutes."

"What about the night before that? Did you call on Larry Bartin just because you happened to be in the neighborhood?"

Panic crept into his eyes. I hoped he wasn't going to yell or throw a faint. Another office boy passed the desk, dumped some typewritten sheets with routing slips on them into the wire tray and moved off. I leaned forward.

"I want to know about you and Phyllis. If you don't tell me, I'll find out somewhere else. And it might not be the same story."

"There's nothing to tell," he said desperately. "We just grew up together and then drifted apart. I hadn't even seen her on the street for at least two years before she was killed."

"You saw her just before she was killed."

"I can explain that." He looked as if he hoped he wouldn't have to.

I waited.

"Two nights before Phyllis was killed we ran into each other at the Marimba. We were both alone and we had a drink together. We got to talking over old times and had another drink. Then Phyllis looked at her watch and said she had to leave.

"She got halfway across the room and stopped to talk to some friends. Then she came back to me and asked if I'd do her a favor. She said she'd done some work for a man and was supposed to turn the papers over to him at seven o'colck. She wanted to keep the appointment because he was paying her five hundred dollars for her work. Now her friends were inviting her to a party at Kaneohe if she could leave immediately. Would I be good enough to drop the envelope at the man's house and pick up the money for her? I could send the money over from my office the next day, since she was planning to spend the night at Kaneohe and wanted to have it waiting for her when she got home.

"The situation seemed a little odd but I could hardly refuse her. The man lived right in Waikiki and I had already admitted I was going alone to the evening show at the Kuhio. I had plenty of time

to deliver it. She handed me a sealed envelope from her bag and left with her friends."

There was self-pity in Kirkland's smile. "You're already found out I went to the home of a Mr. Lawrence Bartin. I don't know what else you've learned but I can tell you the truth in a few words."

I indicated that I was all ears.

"Bartin opened the door. I introduced myself and he invited me in and opened the envelope. He gave me the money and I thanked him and started for the door. He called after me: 'How long have *you* been helping Phyllis with her blackmail racket?' He was holding a photograph he had taken from the envelope and I saw it was all that the envelope contained. I snatched it out of his hand and looked at it. I don't remember how I got out of the house and I forgot all about going to the theater that night.

"I called Phyllis' home the next day and left word with Mrs. Bauer that I would be by at seven that evening and to tell Phyllis if she wasn't there I intended to wait for her.

"Phyllis was there and she laughed at me. I was angry and without thinking very clearly, I gave her the money when she demanded it and tried to make her see what a terrible thing she was doing. She only laughed harder and pointed out that I was now an accessory. Then I demanded the money back or that she send it to Bartin. She not only refused but she had the effrontery to ask me to work with her. She said there was plenty in it for both of us and nobody would suspect a stick-in-the-mud like me. I left then. I was afraid I'd lose my temper completely and do something desperate. Two mornings later I read in the paper that she had been murdered. And that's everything I know."

I ASKED: "Why didn't you tell the police about Bartin then?"

"I was away on the mainland for several weeks after it happened. When I got back the furor had died down and I couldn't see any reason for causing the case to be opened again and possibly involving myself in a nasty scandal. After all, the police had covered the ground thoroughly and there was absolutely nothing to indicate that Bartin was in any way responsible for her death. He wasn't even mentioned. When I got back I read all the back copies of both papers and I know what I'm talking about."

"Let me get this straight," I said coldly. "What you were actually afraid of was the blackmail charge. In spite of the fact that Bartin may very well have murdered the girl you once loved, you decided not to soil your lily-white hands with anything so sordid as a blackmail case."

"It wouldn't have brought Phyllis back to life," he muttered sullenly.

"Suppose Bartin didn't kill her? Suppose he decides to prosecute you for blackmail?"

"He can't because he can't prove anything—and neither can you."

I shrugged. "I'm not a cop. Incidentally, there's one thing you left out of your story."

"I didn't leave out anything."

"What happened to the photograph you carried away from Bartin's house?"

Shame and fear came into his face. "I tore it up." But his hand dropped protectively to the top drawer of the desk.

"You're lying, aren't you?"

"No."

A rear office door opened. I nodded toward it. "Is old blubberpuss back there your boss?"

Kirkland looked over his shoulder at

the large heavy-set individual whose blue pin stripe tried unsuccessfully to mask a king-size belly. The man was holding a folder similar to the one Kirkland had dispatched via the office boy. "Yes, that's Mr. Potter."

"Do I talk to Mr. Potter or do you hand over the picture?"

It worked. I don't know why, but it worked. Slowly and unhappily Kirkland pulled out the drawer. On top, I saw a box of Kleenex and a .22 caliber Banker's Special. Underneath was a green leatherette check register, the kind with four checks to a page and a separate account book fitted inside. He brought it out, kept it hidden by the drawer and thumbed through the sheets of unused checks. He stopped in the middle and I saw what looked like the reverse side of a five-by-seven enlargement. I heard a throat clear nearby and looked up to see the big man bearing down on us. I reached, closed the book quickly and snatched it out of Kirkland's unwilling hands.

"Give that back!" he demanded in a low voice.

"Here comes old Potty," I warned.

He looked around. "Pott*er*!" he corrected desperately. "Please give me my book."

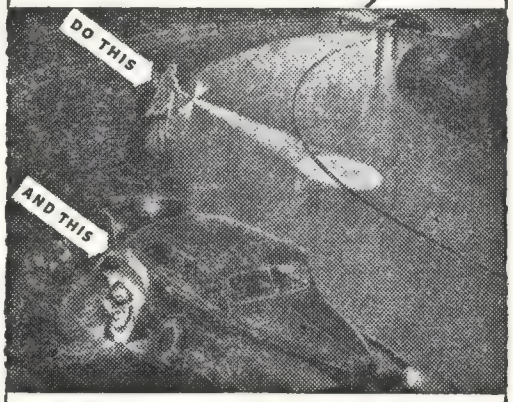
I rose. "Pick it up at my office tomorrow."

"But it's got all my personal accounts in it!"

"Good," I said. "I can tell whether you've been a good boy or not." Potter moved up to the desk and I said: "Thanks very much, Mr. Kirkland. I'll expect you early tomorrow morning. Maybe I'll have come to a decision by then."

Kirkland nodded. His face wore a set smile but his eyes were those of a man going down for the third time. I smiled

If a "flat" anchors you just over the hill... tonight



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Use them not only in flashlights but also for *any* equipment using regular flashlight-cell size batteries. Winchester Repeating Arms Company, New Haven, Connecticut, Division of Olin Industries, Inc.

(Right) No. 6410 Winchester with hanger; complete with batteries, $1.65.

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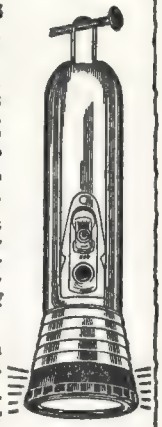

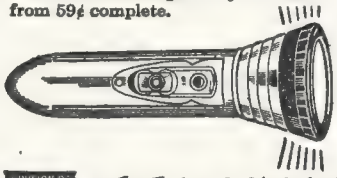

DIVISION OF OLIN INDUSTRIES INC.

WINCHESTER TRADE-MARK

FLASHLIGHTS AND BATTERIES

at both of them and ambled out of the Fidelity Trust Building.

I turned into the nearest restaurant, nodded to an architect whose wife's personal maid's boyfriend I had sent to the clink, and persuaded the plump Japanese waitress I really wanted to sit at the vacant table-for-two against the wall.

I ordered lunch and occupied myself with Kirkland's financial status until it arrived. It made dull reading. Every seven days Kirkland deposited $67.50 in his savings account and on the last day of the month he transferred one hundred and fifty dollars to his checking account. Checks were made out for rent, garage, department stores, auto repairs, and there wasn't a single check drawn to "Cash" for over ten dollars. The waitress brought my order and moved away. I thumbed through the unused check section of the book until I came to the photograph. I let out a low whistle.

The girl was dancing barefooted on what looked like Bartin's dining room table. Bartin's face protruded in the lower left-hand corner of the picture, grinning idiotically. A long bob fell over the girl's partly averted face successfully masking her identity—though she obivously wasn't aware that a picture was being taken. Once before I had seen a hula like that. It was one Saturday afternoon down behind the car barns and a mason jar of *okolehao* was passing from hand to hand around a circle of grinning bus drivers. Each driver gave his own version of the dance and none of the interpretations would have met with the approval of a Sunday soiree at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The girl's hula skirt was of the colorless cellophane variety and she could have worn three of them without being overdressed.

I got a whiff of *pikake* perfume and Madge O'Neill slid into the seat opposite me. I slipped the photograph into my pocket.

THE forest green ensemble went well with her hazel eyes and auburn hair but at the moment she didn't seem to be conscious of her striking appearance. She pushed a folded noon edition across the table.

The paper's police reporter had been in Lieutenant Walter Chun's office when an anonymous caller had phoned in the tip that a well-known Honolulu private investigator was involved in the Betty Hart murder. Lieutenant Chun had immediately dialed the private investigator's number only to be informed by the switchboard operator who took his calls that he hadn't appeared at the office since Saturday. He had then telephoned the private detective's apartment but there hadn't been any answer. Chun stated he was not contemplating an arrest at the moment—there were just some questions he wanted answered.

Chun would never had put out that last statement if he hadn't expected me to read it. It was his way of saying I could come in willingly—or else. I wasn't too happy about the fact that a large part of the Honolulu police force knew me by sight. I sighed and pushed the paper back to Madge.

"They are talking about you, aren't they?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Have you seen Chun yet?"

"No."

"Are you going to?"

"Not for awhile."

"Why, Johnny? What's happened?"

"Maybe you can tell me."

"Tell you what?" Her expression of puzzlement was well done but her eyes were guarded.

I said: "Honey, I've known Manny a

long time. I know he expects the cops to earn the taxpayers' money and I know he's no stool pigeon. But I also know he couldn't stay in business five minutes if he didn't have a pipeline into headquarters. Two women have walked out of his place in apparently cheerful frames of mind and gotten themselves murdered a few hours later. The fact that he hasn't tipped the cops off to the circumstances surrounding that coincidence makes me wonder if it really *is* coincidence."

"Would you stop wondering if I told you I asked Manny not to get mixed up in it?"

"It would help if you told me why."

She avoided my eyes. "Manny is in a tough racket, Johnny. I don't have to tell you that. In a few more years he can quit. I don't want him to run any more risks than he has to before that time comes. We've got our share of troubles as it is."

I shook my head. "I still don't get it."

"Is it so important that you 'get' everything?" she flared. "Why do you have to mix in everybody's life?"

"Usually, I get paid for it. This time, somebody mixed into mine."

"What are you talking about?"

I thought it over and decided I didn't have anything to lose. I started in with Betty Hart calling at my office and told her everything up to and including my waking up on the *hikiee* and finding her body beside me.

She was concerned and embarrassed at the same time. "I'm sorry I blew up, Johnny."

"I'm not looking for sympathy."

"Why didn't you call the police right away? You could have cleared yourself. Chun trusts you."

"Chun is a cop. There wasn't a thing he could have done except arrest me and I'd have done the same thing in his shoes. I was alone in a house with a murdered woman and I'd obviously been there a long time. I needed a shave, I had a hangover and the place smelled like a distillery. There were signs of a struggle during a drinking bout and absolutely nothing to indicate the presence of a third party."

"But you were doped!"

"I'm not an expert on such matters but it was probably by one of the barbiturates. Some people use it for an extra kick when they're drinking. A smart prosecutor could have done things with that."

"But the motive, Johnny! You had no motive!"

"So what? Even if it's unpremeditated, you can spend a long time in the pokey on a second degree rap. If the charge was murder in the first degree, I couldn't even have gotten out on bail to look for evidence. And if you think I'm going to trust myself to a jury of my alleged peers before I have to, you don't know little Johnny very well. Juries make mistakes sometimes. And right now there don't seem to be any other candidates for a noose hanging around—if you'll pardon the pun."

"Don't talk like that!" She started gathering up her newspaper and bag.

I said: "Let's get back to Manny."

"I've got to go, Johnny."

"You know something," I accused.

"I don't, I mean—I want to think, Johnny."

"Don't take too long about it."

She rose. "I'll see you very soon, Johnny."

"Sure. Maybe you can even get a pass. I'll wave to you from the platform."

Tears formed in her eyes and she averted her head and hurried out.

I sat down and glumly finished my cigarette. I didn't feel too proud of my-

self. Anybody who works on his own has to carry self-respect like a chip on his shoulder. And I had the feeling I had just exhibited all the earmarks of any other rat caught in a jam. I ducked the cigarette and got out of the restaurant. It was time I had another talk with Larry Bartin.

CHAPTER FIVE

Massacre

I PARKED in the street and walked along the strip of grass beside the curving gravel drive. Then I heard the shot. The reverberation hadn't died away before there were two more in rapid succession.

I got out the .38 and raced for Bartin's front door. It was partly open. I dropped to one knee and pushed it all the way open. As it banged against the wall I heard a shuffle of feet in the kitchen and then the slam of the back door. I made it across the waxed floors as fast as I could. The kitchen was empty. I eased the door open and peered out. I didn't see anybody. I turned back through the kitchen into the living room, stopped—and listened to the stealthy movement in the nearest bedroom. I flattened against the wall, held the gun on the door and waited. The sound of heavy breathing came from down low, as though the person were crawling on his hands and knees. He could also be dragging himself.

I threw open the door and aimed.

Smitty, Bartin's Filipino butler, was dragging himself toward the door on his elbows. His chest had been blasted, there was another wound in his shoulder and he was practically swimming in his own blood. He raised his head feebly, saw me, and the long barreled Colt came up. Before I could make up my mind to fire, the gun dropped from his hand and his face smashed into the floor. I winced and knelt down beside him. He was as dead as he ever would be. I don't know what had kept him alive at all after those slugs had ripped into him. The Filipinos are a very tough race. I got up and walked through the connecting bathroom to the other bedroom.

Larry Bartin lay sprawled on the floor face down, his head toward the door. He was dead but he hadn't been for very long. Like the Filipino, he had taken a slug in his chest but he hadn't bled as much. There were no signs of a struggle in here. Possibly one reason was that Bartin's .32 lay unfired on the bureau across the room. Beside the bed at eye-level, a wall safe hung open. There was nothing in it.

I went back to the other bedroom. The spread on the twin bed nearest me had a few flat wrinkles, as though someone had sat restlessly on the edge of the bed. Beside the wrinkled portion of the spread was a faint lipstick smear, the kind left by the finger of a careless or absent-minded woman in other people's books. I was sure I detected the faint scent of *pikake* perfume.

I went out into the living room—and caught a sudden movement outside the open window. I ran to the window, saw the figure dash across the brief stretch of lawn and start through the hibiscus hedge. I kicked the screen out and called: "Hold it, Kirkland!"

I slid over the window sill and landed in the soft loam of the flower border. Kirkand was holding the Banker's Special indecisively angled at the ground between us. I wagged my gun at him. "Drop it." He hesitated, dropped the gun on the ground. I picked it up. "Let's go in the house."

He shrugged and marched ahead of me to the front door. We went into the living room and I motioned him to the sofa. I examined his gun and discovered I hadn't had anything to worry about. The safety lock was still on and each chamber held an unfired cartridge. It probably hadn't been cleaned or fired since it was purchased. I said: "Where's the gun you used?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't any other gun."

"What are you doing here?"

"That's none of your business," he said defiantly.

I pocketed his gun and raised my own. "Pretend I'm making it my business."

He swallowed. "I want to see Bartin."

"What about?"

"I'm going to tell him about that picture. I'm going to tell him you've got it and that I didn't have anything to do with it."

"How long have you been outside?"

"I don't know. Maybe ten minutes."

"Why in the bushes?"

"I heard shots when I was walking up to the house and then I heard footsteps behind me. I jumped behind the oleander and saw you run up to the front door. Then two men ran out the rear entrance and went through the hedge. I was trying to find out what had happened inside when you came into the living room and saw me."

"Who were the two men?"

"I don't know. I just caught a glimpse of them from behind. They were both big men and one wore a dark suit, blue, I think. The other had on a brown camel's hair jacket and gray flannels."

"What are you packing a gun for?"

Kirkland's lips worked. "I brought it for protection. I didn't know how Bartin would act when he saw me and I wanted him to know I'd take care of myself."

"Get up." He rose and I gestured toward the bedroom door.

"What are you going to do?"

"You said you wanted to see Larry Bartin."

Kirkland crossed nervously to the bedroom door, looked down at the Filipino and his knees buckled. He hung onto the doorframe and his face got gray. I nudged him with the barrel of the automatic. "Inside." He stared at me and tried to talk but no words came out. I said: "Through the bathroom." He sidled around the body, walked stiff-legged into the other room. He took one gaping look at Bartin's body and shrank away from me.

"You—you murdered—!"

I grimaced. "I was behind you when the shots were fired. You better remember that."

"I'm going to be sick."

I steped aside and he staggered into the bathroom and proceeded to be very sick. He tottered to the basin and splashed cold water on his face. I smoked a cigarette and leaned against the door. Finally, he straightened. "I've got to get away before the police get here," he gasped.

"Why?"

He gazed at me in wonderment. "The publicity. I could lose my job."

"You might even lose your life."

He stared blankly and staggered back across the room and got sick again. He returned to the basin and splashed more cold water on his face. "Have you called the police?" he asked weakly.

"The cops can wait awhile."

"I've got to get out of here."

"You're going with me."

"Where?"

"We're going to see a man about some murders."

"Who?"

"The killer—I hope."

He backed away from me. "I don't know anything. I won't be any help to you."

"I agree," I said amiably, "but I haven't got time to get my scout troop together. I'll just have to get along with you."

"No!"

I waved the gun at him. He turned and went through the bedroom, making a wide circle around the body of the Filipino.

THE FAT MAN looked up in surprise as we entered the library. I said: "Apparently you didn't hear the bell."

Julian Ranke's face wore an expression of distaste. "Are you sure you rang it, Mr. Ford? Who is your friend?"

"His name is Smith," I said. "We just passed your butler and chauffeur barreling down Kahala Avenue toward Waikiki. Where's the fire?"

"My chauffeur is driving Donald to Waikiki to do some marketing before the stores close. Not that it's any of your business."

"So the boys have gone marketing."

Ranke nodded. "Does that interest you?" he inquired acidly.

"I thought maybe they had gone back to the scene of the crime."

Ranke's pudgy hands were resting on the corners of the ornately carved desk. His right hand fluttered into a partly opened drawer and I went for my gun. Kirkland gave a frightened start and fell against my arm. He couldn't have done a better job if he'd planned it. I pulled away frantically but Ranke's squat automatic was already aimed negligently in my direction. "Clumsy, clumsy," he reproved.

I let my hand fall to my side and eyed Kirkland bitterly. I cursed him as efficiently, as forcefully and as colorfully as more than three decades of experience would let me. I had worked up a good head of steam when Ranke rapped on the desk.

"A beautiful exhibition, Mr. Ford. I wasn't aware the English language contained so many four-letter Anglo-Saxon monosyllables."

I paused and regarded him balefully.

He was exuding good humor. "Before we continue our discussion, Mr. Smith, perhaps you will be good enough to remove Mr. Ford's gun. No! No! Don't step in front of him. That's right, just the thumb and forefinger, please. Thank you, Mr. Smith." Ranke placed the gun on the blotter, put his own down within easy reach and clasped his hands on the desk. Outside, a car rolled smoothly up the drive toward the garage. Ranke smiled. "That will be Donald and Raymond."

Kirkland seemed to have a sudden thought. He moved over to me and patted my side pockets. Ranke grabbed up both guns and Kirkland's hand came out of my pocket holding his Banker's Special by the short barrel. "My gun," he explained.

Ranke sighed. "I don't know why I didn't shoot you, Mr. Smith. Put the gun on the desk."

"But it's mine," Kirkland protested. "He took it away from me."

"Mr. Smith," Ranke said patiently, "you are standing on my brand new Persian prayer rug. I should hate to have it stained but I shall certainly shoot you if you don't put that gun on the desk in exactly two seconds."

Kirkland dutifully laid the gun on the desk. He looked down at the prayer rug and carefully stepped off it. I couldn't help it. I burst out laughing.

Ranke stared at me blankly, then the meaning of Kirkland's action dawned on him and he broke into a high whinneying laugh. He stopped suddenly.

"Now, Mr. Ford, I believe you had something on your mind?"

I didn't say anything.

"I must insist, Mr. Ford."

The door smashed open behind me and a cold voice said: "Reach!"

Three pairs of hands went into the air and I turned to see the grave-faced English Tommy swing noiselessly into the room followed by the blond torpedo with the crooked mouth. Both were holding .45's pointing in the general direction of Ranke. Tommy said: "The guns, Joey." Joey scooped up the guns on Ranke's desk and distributed them in his pockets. The two men took up stations and Manny Madieros walked into the room.

"Little trouble, Johnny?"

"You could call it that."

"Mind if I finish my business first?" Manny asked apologetically. "I'm in kind of a hurry."

"Brother, after that entrance you can have the keys to the city."

Manny tossed an envelope on the desk. "This your idea of a joke, fat boy?"

Ranke picked up the envelope and tapped it on a thumbnail without bothering to look inside. He had completely regained his composure. "This is just a bill for services rendered, Manny. I thought it a fair cut. If you think another arrangement would be more to our mutual advantage, I'd be glad to discuss it."

Manny shoved his hands down in his coat pockets and eyed the fat man. "I can think of another arrangement."

I grinned. "You can't say you weren't warned, Ranke."

Manny turned around very slowly to face me. "This wasn't your idea?"

I shook my head. "I'm only going to pin a few murders on the guy."

"Come again?"

"Didn't you know? Ranke killed, either personally or by proxy, both Phyllis Bauer and Betty Hart. Half an hour ago he and his two boys bumped off Larry Bartin and his Filipino butler."

"Preposterous!" Ranke exploded.

"Shut up!" Manny commanded. "Is this on the level?"

I nodded.

"How do you make it?"

"Simple when you think about it. Ranke is the best gossip collector in town. He decided he could turn a neat bit of personal profit by keeping the spicier bits to himself and working this robbery-blackmail racket. He chose victims who would have good reasons for not wanting the publicity a police report would give them. Phyllis Bauer was a nosey little number with a talent for blackmail herself. On the night she was killed, she had an argument with Ranke and was probably drunk enough to threaten him with what she knew. Ranke's boys waited until she left Bartin's party and cut her down. Maybe Ranke even ditched his own party and went along.

"He pulled the robbery-blackmail stunt on Betty Hart. She called me in—which didn't scare him until she supposedly hinted before a crowd at your place that she knew something about the Bauer kill. He couldn't take any chances so he sent his boys over to her house to set the stage for a murder-frame. The maid was supposed to come in and discover us in the morning—he hadn't known that Betty had given her maid the weekend off. He found that out from the newspapers and phoned a tip to the cops that I was with Betty that night.

"I talked to Larry Bartin this morning. He had something on his mind that he wouldn't tell me. Obviously it was the idea that Ranke was the killer. Since he had a lot of larceny in his own soul, he probably got in touch with Ranke to see how much his idea was worth. It turned out to be worth his life. Ranke and his two punks went over to Bartin's, rubbed him out and killed his servant who tried to stop their getaway."

Ranke chuckled. "A dramatic recital, Mr. Ford, with one or two major defects. May I point out that since you haven't offered anything that could pass for proof, your story would better fit yourself than me?"

"Your boys were seen leaving Bartin's house. One was wearing a dark blue suit, the other a camel's hair jacket and gray flannels. I passed them on the road a few minutes ago. The chauffeur was wearing a dark blue suit. Your Donald was wearing a brown jacket. If it turns out to be camel's hair and gray flannels—"

THE SCREEN ripped out of the window behind Ranke with a loud crash. Joey and Tommy went for their holstered guns and stopped. Slowly their hands fell to their sides. The grinning Hawaiian in the chauffeur's uniform leaned across the sill and waved the .45 automatic. "All except Mr. Ranke will raise hands."

Hands went up and Donald came through the door on the opposite side of the room. He was wearing a camel's hair jacket, gray flannels and a .45. "Looks like we got here just in time, Julian."

Ranke beamed. "Donald, my boy, you couldn't have chosen a more auspicious moment."

Donald moved around the room, wordlessly frisking each of us. He dumped the assorted artillery on the desk and moved over to face me. Pale eyes stabbed out of a rigid mask of hatred. "The clever detective," he grated softly. Without warning, he raked my face with the gun barrel. As I fell back he shifted the gun to his other hand and slammed his right into my jaw. I went down and instinctively tried to draw myself up into a ball. I wasn't quick enough. The toe of his shoe caught me in the lower ribs and pain fanned out in my chest. The foot caught me again on the side of the jaw and I lost consciousness.

I couldn't have been out more than five minutes. My jaw seemed to be broken and the stabbing pains in my chest got worse instead of better. I peered out under lowered eyelids and saw that Joey, Tommy and Kirkland were standing with their hands clasped behind their necks with Manny a little to one side and in front of them. Donald stood between me and Ranke's desk. Ranke was apparently still behind the desk, and I guessed the Hawaiian had climbed through the window because I heard the shuffle of an unidentified pair of feet from time to time.

"Ford hasn't a shred of proof to back up his charges," Ranke was saying persuasively. "I don't know how seriously he's mixed up in it himself but I *do* know the police can't afford to let up on this thing. They've got to have a culprit and Ford is made to order. He has no family, no close political ties and he couldn't possibly give a satisfactory account of his actions for all of the occasions involved."

"Suppose he can alibi himself on some of the killings?" Manny demanded.

"All we have to do is pick one and concentrate on that. If we throw enough suspicion on him the police won't worry too much about the others. They want to mark those cases closed."

"Ford is a friend of mine."

"Is he as important as your own neck?"

"That supposed to be a threat?"

"It doesn't have to be. There are many things we can accomplish together, Manny. I have a large part of the wealthier element in the palm of my hand, though they don't know it. I have built up my information very painstakingly. All you and I need is a little mutual trust."

"How about showing a little by getting your stooges to stop pointing guns at us?"

"I'm waiting for your answer."

"Suppose I told you to go to hell?"

"You make it exceedingly difficult for me, Manny."

I saw Manny grin as I slammed my feet into the backs of Donald's knees. His body tumbled towards me and I pulled him down. His gun went off beside my ear and then both of us had our hands on the gun and I was on my back with Donald on top of me. Over his shoulder I saw Ranke leaning across the desk maneuvering for a shot. Tommy lunged into view, bounced a glancing left off Ranke's jaw and twisted the gun out of his hand. I got the barrel of Donald's gun twisted around towards his chest and it went off. It was Donald's finger on the trigger but it got a lot of encouragement from mine. Joey moved in barehanded on the Hawaiian and Manny sat down abruptly clawing at his middle. I saw Joey take a slug somewhere and close with the Hawaiian.

Ranke's face appeared over the top of the desk screaming: "Donald! Donald!" He had a gun in each hand. I shot him in the face and he disappeared from view like a jack-in-the-box. I rolled over and saw Manny sitting, feet apart, pouring slugs out of a belly gun. The roar of Tommy's bigger gun drowned out all other sound in the room. The Hawaiian collapsed slowly down the wall and Joey slumped on top of him.

Manny and I rose as Tommy crossed swiftly to Joey. Manny turned to me, still shaking. "We just used up enough luck to last a couple of lifetimes. What's the matter with you, Johnny, don't you ever figure odds?"

I was still so full of hatred for Julian Ranke and Donald that I didn't try to talk. Tommy rose. "Collarbone," he said. "Painful, but I think he's going to be all right."

Now I tried to talk but my mouth wouldn't form the words. Manny stared at me. "You've got a broken jaw, guy."

I nodded dumbly.

Tommy crossed to me and gently

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probed my jaw. "I don't believe it's broken—just dislocated." He stared at me gravely. "I've had a little experience with these things, Mr. Ford. Can you take it?"

I didn't know what he was talking about, but I nodded anyway.

He gripped my face gently but firmly, suddenly snapped my head sideways. For a moment I thought he had broken my neck but the sharpness of the pain was slowly replaced by a dull ache. I worked my jaw gingerly and looked around. "Where's Kirkland?"

Manny nodded toward the sofa.

All I could see was Kirkland's feet sticking out from behind it, angling awkwardly toward the ceiling. I pulled back the sofa, knelt and examined him, felt his pulse. I got up. "Fainted."

Even Tommy grinned. Manny said: "We got to get Joey to a doctor. How do you want to handle this?"

"You guys beat it. I'll call Lieutenant Chun after you go."

Manny shook his head. "You'll never be able to explain all this."

I laid Donald's gun on the blotter. "All I've got to do is tell the truth. I could even cut a few corners and leave you out of it if I didn't have to explain the slugs from that gun of yours."

Manny tossed the short-barreled gun on the desk. "That's simple. Tell 'em it was Ranke's gun."

"Can't it be traced?"

Manny grinned. "Not likely. I took it away from Phyllis Bauer—a long time ago. What about your fainting friend? Won't he talk?"

"I can make him listen to reason."

Manny shrugged and the two men lifted Joey and carried him out.

I waited until I heard the car roll out of the drive, picked up the telephone and called Detective Lieutenant Chun. Then I went around behind the sofa and began to slap Walter Kirkland's face.

THE desk clock said almost midnight. Outside, the games were going full blast and Tommy was ushering in the guests with his usual suave solemnity. A stocky smooth-faced Japanese had replaced Joey on the door to the upstairs room. Manny, for some reason, wasn't around. Nobody had told me why and I was too tired to ask. I sat in Manny's office, in Manny's chair, with my feet on Manny's desk. Madge O'Neill sat on the corner of the desk. I drank the last of my flat drink, stared at the thick-bottomed glass and wondered absently if another drink was worth the effort. Talk had been difficult because of the ache in my jaw but I finished.

"That's about all there is," I mumbled. "We got a lot of stuff that Ranke was using or planning to use for blackmail. Chun took it down to headquarters but you can tell Manny he hasn't anything to worry about. Where the hell is he?"

Madge had tears in her eyes and they seemed to be tears of happiness. "I haven't had a chance to tell you, Johnny. Manny's on his way to California."

"California," I repeated stupidly.

"San Francisco. Julia's dead, Johnny."

"Manny's wife is dead?"

"Manny got the cable early this afternoon, before he went out to Julian Ranke's. He's flying up to the Coast to make arrangements for her burial. I know it's horrible of me to be so happy, but I can't help it. We waited so long."

"Everybody's better off," I said.

She nodded through her tears.

I said: "Since Manny will be on the Coast, I guess you'll be going up to the university tomorrow."

"University? Why?" she asked.

"I was in a jam this morning and you

weren't very eager to help me out. There had to be a reason for that." I got out the picture I had taken from Kirkland and tossed it on the desk. "You might want to have a talk with that kid sister of yours. Kathy's her name, isn't it?"

"Johnny!" The blush began at her throat and her face was crimson.

I said: "Maybe you didn't know about this one. Phyllis was using it to blackmail Bartin. They both figured that if you and Manny saw a picture like that of your kid sister, Bartin's breathing might be permanently interrupted." She didn't touch the picture and I continued more cheerfully: "Bartin had already destroyed the negative and all the prints except this one." I held a match to the picture and it quickly burned to an ash.

I took an envelope out of my pocket and tossed it in her lap. "Here's the last exhibit," I said, "a developed film that Ranke apparently took out of Bartin's safe. There's only one shot that concerns you, one that Phyllis Bauer took of Kathy. There's nothing wrong with the picture except that Kathy is wearing a paper costume hat with 'Friday 13th' printed on it and it puts Kathy with Phyllis on the night Phyllis was murdered—because that was the theme, or whatever you call it, of Bartin's party. My guess is that Bartin was blackmailing you with it."

"Threatening," she said emptily. "He told me that he had it but I never saw it." She made no move to open the envelope. "Kathy is a good kid, Johnny. She got off to a bad start out here. She thought it was smart to do those things because she saw people whom she considered sophisticated doing them. It's all my fault for not being able to look after her properly. I didn't even know she knew people like Bartin's crowd. Kathy came to me and told me everything after Phyllis was killed. She hasn't seen any of them since. I can swear to that." She laid the envelope on the desk.

I picked it up, opened it and dropped the tiny film in the ashtray. I looked at Madge and she nodded. I held a match to it and the flame flared up.

"Thank you, Johnny," she said.

"You didn't tell Manny about the blackmail threat, did you?"

"I was afraid he'd kill Larry."

I asked: "Were you hiding in Bartin's bedroom sometime today?"

She nodded. "While you were there this morning, but I don't see how you knew. I saw you coming up to the house and I didn't want you to find me there. Then I tried to listen through the bedroom door but I couldn't hear anything. Betty Hart's death had frightened me more than anything and I knew you were involved somehow and I was afraid Manny and Larry were too. I went to beg him to give me that picture. Even if my own world fell to pieces, I didn't want to see my kid sister hurt."

I sat up. "Well, I guess that finishes it." I winced. I had moved too suddenly.

Madge began to giggle hysterically.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Johnny, you've been doped, hit over the head with a blackjack, gotten a dislocated jaw, and you have two cracked ribs. What did you get out of it?"

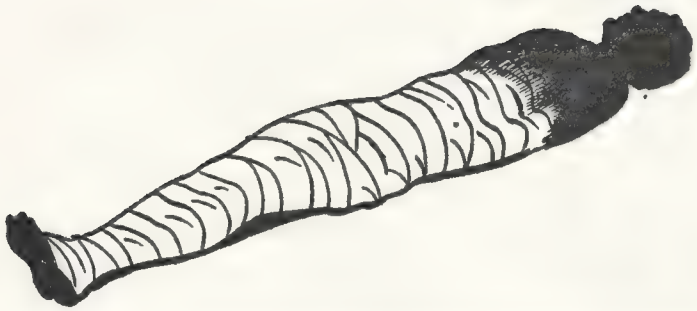
"I saved my neck. Isn't that enough?"

"Yes, but if you weren't a private detective you wouldn't get into these jams. Can you name anything else you got?"

"I got a hundred dollars. Besides—"

"I know," Madge interrupted. "You've said it before—'It's a living!' "

I grinned as much as my sore jaw would allow and limped over to the little bar. I didn't see any percentage in telling her that Betty Hart's hundred bucks would barely cover my medical expenses.



PATTERN FOR SHROUDS

THE sound on the phone was like the slap of a bare hand against a leather-covered cushion. It was two-dimensional, no depth to it at all, and while she had never heard the report of a pistol over the telephone before, she knew instinctively that was what it was.

There had been other sounds from Mr. Glidden's end of the line—his smooth, not unctuous, but gently persuasive voice asking if she was Gertrude Alder Cope. When identities had been established, Hillary Glidden had said: "Mrs. Cope, I have an item for your

The cops' verdict was heart attack. The *Times* called it a shooting case. But they were agreed on one point: whatever had happened to Hillary Glidden, he was now eligible for an obit.

The first short hard - driving blow doubled Morgan over.

By G. T.
FLEMING-ROBERTS

paper that might be of interest to—"

There it had dangled. "Yes?" she'd said with scant inflection, merely a word to let him know that she was there—and where was he? Where had he gone? He'd put down the phone, apparently, without apology or explanation. She'd heard his heavy steps receding, a distant rumble of voices as though from another room, no sound for several minutes. And then the shot.

She didn't scream, but drew the breath for screaming. Her left temple throbbed against the phone receiver. She exhaled thriftily, like an underwater swimmer.

She was aware that seconds ago, or even minutes, her own door chime had sounded. Red Morgan, she suspected—she'd left a message at his flat earlier in the evening—and much as she wanted to talk to him, she hadn't left her listening post to answer his ring. Morgan could wait. Or it was Henry at the door, and he'd forgot his latch key again . . . Where was Henry, anyway? He'd gone out at eleven, "to mail a letter, dear." He'd tacked that on, though she hadn't asked, hadn't cared where he was going, And as he'd turned quickly—an almost ducking exit, she recalled—his open topcoat had swung out from his body, the pocket striking the trim around the door with a mighty *clunk.*

Henry? How perfectly impossible. And yet—

Now she tipped forward in the stiff little chair in front of the telephone table. Body tense, her attitude was one of reaching out and forward as though the Glidden residence, which was actually half way across town, was separated from her only by the pastel-tinted wall of her living room. The silence—it was no true silence, but a hum of wires—became background for footsteps that approached Mr. Glidden's phone. Not the heavy tread, but stealthy, explorative steps that paused for an instant, and then came pelting nearer with a suggestion of panic that she shared.

Someone had discovered the open telephone in Hillary Glidden's residence. Someone had picked it up—the diaphragm trembled with shallow, anxious breathing—was listening as she listened. Someone who wondered who she was and, more important, how much she had heard.

SHE lowered the handset, stared at it as though it held a reptilian fascination for her, and then dropped it from suddenly cold fingers onto its base to cut the thread between herself and . . . Murder? And could she be absolutely sure the thread was cut? There was a sound behind her in the room. She stood and turned with a swiftness that blended the two movements into a single movement.

"Red!"

Red Morgan stood in front of the bleached wood liquor cabinet at the other end of the room, his back toward her, fixing himself a drink. That was all right. He looked very ordinary, very comfortable standing there, like old shoes in a closet.

His dry, not unpleasant voice said: "That was the most uninformative telephone conversation I ever eavesdropped on."

She drew a breath. "Was the front door unlocked?" . . . Knowing that it must have been; knowing that from now on locking doors must become a ritual with her.

Morgan added soda to Scotch, turned, looked at her oddly from ruddy eyes that almost matched his hair. "I rang. I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Of course not," she assured him. There was never anything presumptuous about him, simply an utter lack of self-consciousness. He was tall and lean, but not angular. No straight lines in the baggy topcoat he wore nor in the brown suit beneath. No edge to him at all, and yet there was no hint of softness either. A homely, blunt appearing man of thirty-four who said blunt things in the editorial columns on the *Times*.

She moved over to the coffee table for cigarettes while Morgan carried his drink to one of the low, gold chairs. The room was spacious, very modern, and very plain. Belonging to Gertrude Alder Cope, it could not be otherwise, Morgan thought. It could not contain anything that might distract the eye from the central motif of decoration which was always Gertrude Alder Cope. There were great expanses of mirror on opposite walls so that this motif—she was sheathed in black satin tonight—was repeated an infinite number of times.

Morgan leaned back and for a nightmarish moment allowed the mirrors to suggest the presence of hundreds, of thousands of Gertrude Alder Copes, all pacing back and forth across beige carpet, long-limbed and feline, all trailing clouds of cigarette smoke, all tall lush blondes with none of the mental attributes of lush blondes . . . There he broke it off, his mind springing to the consolation that this was mere illusion. There was, thank goodness, only one Gertrude Alder Cope.

"Where's Henry?" he asked.

She shook her head. That could mean she didn't know, and/or she did not give a damn, and/or she could not have so trivial a subject as her husband interrupt the train of her thought which plunged foward, he guessed, toward Tuesday's city election from which Gertrude Alder Cope woud undoubtedly emerge as a new and politically powerful figure. Her husband, Henry Cope, was editor of the *Times*, it said in fine print on the masthead, but Alder money had controlled the paper for generations. When Morgan quoted "the boss" he always referred to Gertrude Alder Cope—not Henry.

It was Gertrude Alder Cope who had decided, in a strategic moment, that the *Times* would swing its heavy artillery on the Glidden political machine. That was fine, an idea Morgan was willing to buy. But when he dug around a little to discover Gertrude Alder Cope's motive, he found nothing deeper than her love of smashing things. Preferably big, long-established things that made a noisy clatter when they fell apart.

"Get Glidden for me, lover," she'd said to Morgan. Eyes shiny with malice, she'd said that, a gamin in mink and nylon tying a tin can to the tail of a large and vicious old dog.

Well, he'd got Glidden, but not for her, he'd wanted her to know. For the town.

Now he listened to the angry rustle of her satin hostess gown and watched her frown rob large blue eyes of their usual, if wholly false, appearance of innocent credulity. He said: "I thought you wanted to talk to me."

She stopped directly in front of him, her cigarette forked between fingers of an exquisitely formed hand.

"Tell me something, lover—" her word for any male who could be the slightest possible use to her, "if I were to ask you to save Glidden for me, what would you do?"

He said simply: "Tell you to go to hell."

Her laugh had a certain tautness.

"Yes, you're monotonously consistent and forthright, I know . . ."

"Thanks." He put his nose into his highball.

". . . but just pretend for a moment that you're on Glidden's side and you wanted to save Glidden's hand-picked slate in the election—what would be your first move?"

"There wouldn't be any," he said with quiet assurance. "They can take down the MacAlear-for-Mayor posters right now. Glidden came up to my office this afternoon. It was . . ."

His voice trailed off, his gaze remote, remembering how it was. Unpleasant. Hillary Glidden had stood in front of Morgan's desk, a tall, once-powerfully built man, gray and gone to paunch. He'd smiled at Morgan. If he'd hit Morgan with the familiar gold-tipped cane, that would have been all right. But then he'd smiled and said: "That was a body-blow, son," referring to Morgan's expose of the two hundred thousand dollar Northleigh sewer graft. He'd said some other things and then he'd gone away, suddenly old—so old there was no accompanying sense of triumph in having beaten him . . .

MORGAN put his glass down on the end table. For a moment he considered, in a dispassionate way, the excellent proportions of Gertrude Alder Cope's figure. He thought it was too bad she had the mind of a Spanish conquistador. She wouldn't understand how he felt about what he'd done to Hillary Glidden—neither elation nor deep sorrow nor even a mild satisfaction. He'd accomplished a dirty but necessary job and now he wanted to forget about it.

He said: "Glidden practically conceded."

She made a shelf of one arm across her midriff, propped an elbow on it while she drew thoughtfully at her cigarette.

"Suppose Glidden were to assume those Northleigh sewer bonds and reimburse the city for the loss out of his own pocket. Would that turn the tide?"

He thought that over a moment, absently twisting the heavy gold signet ring he wore around and around his finger. "I don't think so. When you deny dishonest intent—that's what it would amount to—you've just about got to admit incompetence, and I can't see how that would strengthen his position."

She mulled that over. Her eyes had an odd glint. Something was bothering Gertrude Alder Cope, but he wasn't sure he wanted to know what it was. He stood up, remembering his highball, lifted and drained the glass. She caught him watching her from the ends of his eyes and suddenly turned her back under pretext of finding an ash tray.

"Is that all?" he asked.

Her pale gold head nodded.

"Think you can sleep now?"

"Yes."

He thought that if you prodded under the word you wouldn't find much conviction. He didn't prod. He picked up his comfortably old hat and started toward the cased opening into the hall.

"Red."

He paused, glanced back. Fear, real and personal, looked out of round blue eyes, but only for an instant before Gertrude Alder Cope became frowningly concerned with brightly lacquered fingernails.

"I wish you'd find out for me, lover. Find out if that's what Hillary Glidden had—has up his sleeve."

"Well," he said slowly, "which is it—had or has?"

Her laugh was pretty good. You'd scarcely know it from the real thing. "Did I say 'had'? That only goes to show that even I am influenced by the legend of Morgan infallibility, because you've assured me that Glidden is politically dead. Of course—" she came toward him, smiling, and he thought that this was the first time he'd known Gertrude Alder Cope to use two wholly feminine weapons: charm and diverting chatter, "you're not infallible. You're simply sincere, and that's a trait that is sometimes mistaken for infallibility."

She was standing close to him, her arms straight down at her sides, her eyes demurely lowered. She'd stopped being Gertrude Alder Cope and had become a woman. She would be soft and yielding in his arms. Her lips would respond to his. Kissing her would be all right. From her viewpoint, it would be all right, but from his . . .? His was confused, exactly as she intended, he realized. He didn't like it—her trying that sort of stuff on him, as well as they knew each other. His eyes narrowed.

"Let's cut out the razzle-dazzle, sweetheart."

The harshness of his voice startled her. She took a backward step and sank down on the arm of a chair. Her eyes were fixed on his face.

"If Glidden were to take up those bonds," he said, "it wouldn't be a political move at all. It would indicate a turn of conscience, and we'd have to give him every break we possibly could. What gave you the idea he might try that, anyway?"

She said: "It was speculation, Red. You know I've tried to anticipate every move the opposition could make throughout the campaign." She smiled wryly. "I've missed my beauty sleep lots of times."

He said coldly: "I hadn't noticed." He put on his hat and turned into the hall with its slim staircase of stainless steel. As he moved toward the door, he flung back at her: "I'll find out. You know damned well I'll find out."

NEIL Street was narrow and old and poor. Hillary Glidden, who had made the common touch pay big political dividends, lived there in a three story brick house with brass railed stone steps leading up to the door from the sidewalk. Light slanted down through Venetian blinds behind the windows of the front rooms, but there was no answer to Morgan's ring. He hesitated a moment, then tried the knob. The door was unlocked, and he put head and shoulders into a narrow central hall without actually crossing the sill.

"Mr. Glidden," he called.

There was no answer. Morgan drew back and closed the door quietly. There was something disturbingly incongruous about an unlocked door and empty silence. He turned on the top step, looked right and left along deserted Neil Street. He took out cigarettes, lighted one, glanced at his watch before tossing the match away. Friday morning was just fifteen minutes old. The October air was chill and damp and pungent with smoke. A car turned into Neil from Eighth and slowed to the curb to stop directly behind Morgan's heap. The man who got out was tall and broad across the shoulders. It might have been Glidden except that quick, plunging steps denoted a much younger person. Noticing the glow of Morgan's cigarette, the other said hello in a deep, bluff, back-slapping voice.

Morgan uttered a short, quiet laugh. He said: "Egan, it's Red Morgan."

Ray Egan, Glidden's right arm and a safe bet for the lucrative job of City Comptroller if MacAlear was elected, stopped half way up the steps. His breath was tenuous white vapor.

"What do you want, Morgan?" His voice was still deep and bluff, but it lacked that lodge-night cordiality.

"That I'll tell to the old man." And as Egan came up the steps and put a thumb on the bell-push, Morgan said: "I tried that."

"He's in," Egan said. "I talked to him on the phone about an hour ago." He twisted the doorknob, pushed the door open, and stepped over the sill. "Hillary," he called.

"I tried that, too," Morgan said and followed Egan into the hall.

Egan turned, looked at Morgan. Egan's frown was habitual. It lent an appearance of importance to a rather insignificant round face, tightened the softness of it. He said: "I guess Hillary will see you."

"He should," Morgan said. "I saw him when he called at the office this afternoon."

The muddy brown eyes were briefly disconcerted, Morgan thought. Then Egan took off his pearl gray hat and waved it toward Hillary Glidden's study which opened off the hall to the left. "Go in there and have a chair," he suggested. "I'll see if Hillary is in the bathroom. If he had the water running, he mightn't hear."

Morgan didn't hear any water running, but he went on into the study where light from a fluorescent lamp spread across the top of a huge oak desk centering the room. In the fringes of shadow were comfortable leather chairs, a smaller desk with a drophead for typewriter, a bookcase with a white plaster bust of Washington on top. Morgan listened to Egan's steps going off somewhere across the hall and then moved around to the kneehole side of the desk. A photograph in a silver frame arrested attention with its sober eyes—a girl with light brown hair and mouth that suggested infinite sweetness without smiling. Nora Glidden, Hillary's daughter, had a quiet sort of charm. In a room with Gertrude Alder Cope, you wouldn't notice Nora Glidden at first, but eventually you would, and when you did she'd get into you, deep.

Morgan pulled his eyes away from the photo, noticed that the telephone directory was open somewhere in the C's. The number that belonged to Henry and Gertrude Alder Cope was conspicuously circled by a pencil line. Morgan pushed a finger under the cover of the book and flipped it shut. The resulting puff of air blew a sheet of paper from the other end of the desk to the floor. He stepped around the chair, stopped, picked up the paper to replace it, straightened slowly, eyes on the paper that trembled slightly in his fingers. It was a typewritten note:

> Nora darling:
> I hope you'll forgive me, but this appeals more to me than defeat and disgrace.
>
> All my love,
> Hillary Glidden

The pen had blotted heavily at the end of the signature, an odd blot suggesting a black Halloween cat minus its head.

The paper slipped from Morgan's fingers to the desk. He looked up and across the hall through the open door of the living room. Ray Egan's shadow was projected hugely across the white limestone of the fireplace. The shadow moved with a clumsy, lurching motion like something maimed, then Egan himself stumbled into view. His round face was pale, his forehead shiny with sweat. His eyes had a dull, stunned look.

Morgan stepped out into the hall and through the living room door. Egan had fumbled out a handkerchief and, with the same hand, motioned toward an open door at the other end of the room. "Heart," he mumbled. "Got to phone Nora. She's at MacAlear's. Doc Laymon. . ."

Morgan brushed past Egan, went to the door of a tiny, windowless powder room. Hillary Glidden in gray trousers and maroon wool robe lay on his back on the tile floor, head turned slightly to the left. Death had taken up the slack in the big, loose face, the eyes were open, staring. On the floor beside a big clenched fist was a small, uncorked, green bottle. Its label read: *Tincture Digitalis.*

Morgan turned. Egan had left the living room to return to the study where Morgan found him standing behind the desk, one hand on the phone, looking down at the note that Glidden had left. At the sound of Morgan's step, Egan raised muddy brown eyes.

"Damn you, Morgan," he said quietly, with feeling. "Damn you. You finally got him, didn't you?"

Morgan put a hand into a topcoat pocket where it fumbled emptiness. His mouth was stiff and dry.

CHAPTER TWO

An Old Story

LATE Friday night, the dogwatch hush in the *Times* editorial offices was spattered with light, quick footsteps. Morgan looked up from the blank piece of paper that drooped dejectedly from his typewriter and out through the glass partition of his cubicle into the city room, big in almost emptiness. Henry Cope appeared at the head of the stairs, waved a dripping umbrella at Tim Fetsch, the night man, then crossed hurriedly to Morgan's door. He wore his black Homburg jauntily and a wedge of dress shirt gleamed through open flaps of his straight, dark topcoat. Glare struck across the polished lenses of his glasses so that you couldn't see what his eyes were doing, but his smile was the standard Henry Cope ingratiating smile.

"I don't want to bother you, Red, if you're working."

"You're not," Morgan said, "and I'm not. I was just thinking I'd knock off, go over to the Alibi, and put down a few." He flipped a cigarette pack across the desk, and Henry Cope reached for it with a small, spidery hand, the back of which was sparsely covered with fine black hair. Morgan rather liked the little man. Either liked him, or pitied him because of the puppet dance Gertrude Alder Cope put him through.

"I thought maybe you'd like to come over to the Commoners' Club," Henry Cope suggested. "We're throwing a stag party for Thurlow after his radio address tonight."

Morgan shook his head. "Include me out. I'm not that kind of a commoner. No Packard."

Henry Cope tipped his head out of direct light and his eyes stopped looking like the windows of an empty house. They became small, dark, and, for the moment, shrewd.

"You don't feel that you're responsible for Hillary Glidden's suicide, do you?"

"Why should I?"

"I knew a kid once, just one of the thousands of reporters who were covering the Lindbergh kidnaping, who got it into his head something he'd said in the paper was responsible for the baby's

murder. It smashed him up pretty bad."

Morgan tipped back in his chair. He said: "Oh, for cripesakes," or something like that. Then after an interval of moody silence, he asked: "Where did Gertrude get the idea that Glidden might take up those Northleigh sewer bonds at face value?"

Henry Cope frowned slightly. "Did she say that?"

Morgan said: "And when I came in last night, she was on the telephone. She listened and she didn't talk back. She didn't even say good-bye, and when she turned away, she was scared white."

Henry pushed his lips into a slight smile. "That's something I'd like to experience—Gertrude listening and not talking back."

"Another thing, Henry. Glidden's phone directory was open and your number encircled. Either he'd called your place or he'd intended to."

The cigarette which Henry Cope extended toward Morgan's ash tray trembled slightly. He changed his mind about tapping off the ash, dropped the butt, and turned abruptly toward the door. He said of Gertrude Alder Cope: "She never takes me into her confidence." His voice was a bit wistful. "I don't know a thing."

Morgan straightened up out of the chair and stretched his arms wearily. "Neither do I, Henry. But I'm going to find out."

Henry hesitated in the doorway, glanced back as though about to speak. He didn't speak, however, but started back across the city room, his step less light, almost trudging.

The girl came into the Alibi Taproom at eleven-fifteen. She wore no hat. Her usually light brown hair hung dark and straight and damp, plastered across her brow where she'd pushed it back from sober hazel eyes. That alone, the wet hair, would have made a hag of another woman, but on her it was all right. She looked clean and sweet. She made the "Ladies Welcome" sign on the window mean something.

She came in hesitantly out of the rain, her fingers clinging to the edge of the door she'd opened as though she wasn't sure this was the place. Not timid, but just not sure, a lost look you'd say she had. She let the door go finally, put the hand that had held it down deep into the pocket of her tan wool fleece coat. Her fingers worked in the pocket, unconsciously drying themselves on a hanky that was wadded there. Her shoulders drew up a little as she took a breath. She stared for a moment through stratified cigarette smoke, and then moved deliberately toward the back of the room, wet brown loafers squishing with every considered step.

The patrons of the Alibi were men. The office of the *Telegram* was across the street, and out back, on the other side of the alley, was the rear of the *Times* building; so they were newspapermen, and they'd seen everything.

Silence nudged along the bar until it reached Red Morgan at the very end. He raised moody, disinterested eyes from his glass, tipped back a little, and looked at her. A long look; it didn't believe at first, and then it did and scuttled back to the empty glass. He clutched the glass—no reason except that it was there and he felt like clutching something. The backbar mirror caught his narrow face, the sudden sickly pallor of it.

He heard: "Bill—" and no one ever called him anything but Red—"Bill Morgan."

Her voice was calm. It fell softly, intimately into the silence as though they were alone.

Morgan slid from the stool, wavered a little on his feet. He didn't quite look at her. You don't, at an angel, especially if while playing in the mud you've spattered her a little, you don't quite look. His jaws worked, their muscles came into his hollow cheeks and went again like an erratic pulse.

"Nora Glidden," she said. "Remember? One of the Press Club parties, wasn't it?" Her smile went out to him, slow, quiet, touching her fine eyes.

"Yes, How're you—" Some inane thing like that, then he fumbled up toward the brim of his old gray hat and started toward the door.

NOT a sound from anybody at the bar. They were taking this all in, to a man. This was a story. It woudn't print, maybe, but it would tell very well. You could say, Nora Glidden came into the Alibi Friday night, just about twenty-four hours after her old man died. She was looking for Red Morgan . . . No, not with a gun. She smiled at him. Her old man's smile—remember how it started slow, and when it reached his eyes you knew he meant it? That same smile that helped him run this town for twenty years. . .

You could kick it around like that, a conversation piece, stranger than fiction.

Not a sound in the place except their footsteps going toward the door—Morgan's dull and down there somewhere, Nora Glidden's squishing with wetness, a little behind and to the left. Outside, he turned east into the rain. His flat was within walking distance; he didn't have his car. Nora Glidden touched his sleeve, and he glanced down and saw her head tipped back, her mouth and chin proud.

"There's no reason to be . . . rude, Bill Morgan."

"Sorry." He coughed. "I'm sorry, Nora. I think I'm a little tight." He lengthened his steps, but there were more of hers to keep abreast of him.

"Bill, I want to talk to you."

He moved his head a little to avoid the dripping scallop of the awning. "All right," he said, but wondered why. Nothing she could say could alter the plot nor change their distinctly separate roles—hers, that of the bereaved; his, the hachetman. He could say he hadn't thought about her when he'd done the thing he'd done, and not be quite sincere, because even if he'd thought of her he still would have smashed at Glidden when the opportunity arose. For the sake of the town, Glidden had to go—not necessarily to die—but then he had, and no amount of talking could ever alter that.

But she was talking anyway as they hurried along the sidewalk, going nowhere. "Yesterday, after he came from your office, Dad told me: 'You can trust Bill Morgan. He honestly believes exactly what he says.'"

Yesterday in Morgan's office, Glidden had said he liked a good fighter and a good checker player, and Morgan had said: "Then it's your move, Mr. Glidden," telling Glidden he should stick to checkers, because as a fighter he was through. Morgan would always remember how the old man's smile had faded, how the big face had crumpled. All the years had come crashing down at once on Glidden. And Morgan had thought in self-reproach, what a rotten thing to do—to hold a mirror up to Age.

But Glidden had to go. . .

A car splashed in close to the curb. A husky voice from the depths of the cab asked: "Taxi, Mister?" Morgan shook his head. He didn't know where he was going, so why take a cab? But Nora

Glidden stopped, tugged at Morgan's sleeve. She called, "Just a minute," to the driver of the hack. She turned to Morgan. It was too dark to see her face, but he could see it as it had looked at him from the silver frame on her father's desk—the clean lines of it, the sweet grave mouth.

"Bill, won't you take me home? There's something there I want to show you. Please, Bill."

"All right." Then he was numbly following Nora Glidden to the cab, then getting in beside her to sit on the edge of the cushions until acceleration jerked him back. His lank body settled stoically. He listened to the restless slap-slap of the windshield wipers, the hiss of tires on wet asphalt, listened to Nora Glidden's rapid, nervous flow of talk.

". . . and there are two sides, aren't there, Bill? Something good in each. People on opposite sides can believe sincerely and fervently—not all people, of course—"

"Believe sincerely and fervently in what?" he asked her harshly. "In the largest per capita number of gambling joints and call houses of any city in the country? In corruption in public office? In an entire generation brought up to think that if you vote right you'll be taken care of? Is that what you're talking about?"

He heard her sharply indrawn breath.

"Those things—they get out of hand. There's no one man—there's no one big enough—" She stopped. While the cab reeled off two more blocks, she kept very still in her corner.

"All right," he said at last. He found her hand, the warmth of it flowing up through outer dampness. "The machine outgrows the man. So we get a new machine, another man." Only this time he thought, it would be a woman, Gertrude Alder Cope. He took his hand away from Nora's. Hers had been quite unresponsive, and he'd found a ring he hadn't known was there. It oughtn't to have mattered, the way things were between them . . . what there was between them was like a solid wall of glass.

"Nora, it wasn't smart of you coming to me the way you did. There'll be a lot of talk."

She said: "I had to. I've got to have the kind of help that the kind of man Dad said you were can give. They're all —the police, Ray Egan, everybody—they're pussy-footing around the truth. You won't do that. I need your help."

"Wait a minute." He spread his hands in the dark and stared down where they were. "You can't see them—my hands. Blistered, Nora, from digging out in Northleigh. Someone had to dig, and there I was. I went down through gravel, clay, and topsoil—you know they always put the topsoil on the bottom when they lay a sewer—eight feet down, not eighteen where it would have to be to get the necessary fall. And pipe less than half the size it ought to have been."

SHE'D heard all this or she'd read about it: how the project had been railroaded through the council, the contract let to take care of one of Glidden's friends. Two hundred thousand dollars' worth of work not done slapped against assessment rolls to pay for a sewer that wasn't worth a damn and wasn't needed. Northleigh was a speculative real estate bubble that had burst. Walker Slough was out that way, a malarial hole, they said, a trap for children of prospective Northleigh home builders . . .

She knew all this, but he was telling her about it now, his words battering against the wall between them. Batter-

ing without his quite knowing why unless it was to prove to himself the thickness of the wall and how unattainable she was.

"He—Dad didn't know about the Northleigh sewer, Bill. I've been trying to tell you—sometimes things get out of hand. He didn't know—"

"No, listen," he broke through her protest. "This is it, no matter what he knew or didn't know. These are the hands that did the digging, that wrote the story, that smashed the machine, that killed—"

"No, Bill." She caught the blistered hands in hers. "You didn't—you weren't responsible. It wasn't suicide."

His laugh was short, derisive. "No, of course not! Heart attack, they said. That was the police hand-out. They even tried to cram it down my throat, and I'd seen the note. With every top-drawer police job hanging on the election, they naturally wouldn't want it known that the old man at the helm knew he was licked."

Her quiet voice persisted. "I saw the note, too. It wasn't right. Remember the blot? Yet the blotter on the desk was clean. And Dad never called me Nora."

He hadn't noticed the blotter on the desk pad, but he remembered the blot on the note like a Halloween cat without a head.

"Bill, he was—murdered." The word came in a gasp, an idea pent up too long within her. Then there was much to say and no time to say it in. They were suddenly and apprehensively aware of the world outside the cab, of something violent about to happen.

Greenlee Street. Morgan knew that was where they were. The bottleneck. Hardy souls, like hack drivers, used Greenlee as a short-cut through to the main east-west artery. Hard on the left hind wheel of the cab was another car, crowding in and forward. No other traffic in the narrow street, just the two cars, their headlight rays combined and blurred against the rain. The hackie gave ground and cursed under his breath. The second car ate up the intervening space until it ran abreast with only a coat of paint between—and then not even paint. The cab swerved, bucked the curb with a front wheel. Morgan was thrown over against the girl. There was a jolting end to motion, a jarring silence.

"Bill—" with the first quick breath she drew.

"Get down on the floor." He pushed away from her, knowing what this was. Either the hack driver had hit his head on something, or he was playing 'possum, for he was slumped across the steering wheel. Morgan brought his hands together quickly and then apart, stripping the signet ring from his finger. His hand fumbled down into his topcoat pocket, came up again, empty. A thin beam of light fingered in through the cab window. Nora Glidden's hand clenched on Morgan's shoulder, but he didn't look at her.

"I told you to get down onto the floor, didn't I?"

The cab door opened, the dim night glow blocked off solidly by someone on the sidewalk.

"Just you, Morgan." A voice that Morgan didn't know. "Don't start anything. We don't want to have to touch the girl. Come out, both hands up and empty."

He straightened his right leg out through the door, toed the concrete.

"Bill, I'm getting out!" Nora said.

He said harshly; "Let's not be unnecessarily stupid." He stepped out onto the sidewalk, both hands up, his mind

tight. Shadows hedged him in. They smelled like wet sheep. They crowded close. Behind him in the cab, Nora Glidden started to scream. One of the shadows jostled Morgan, got into the cab, and the scream stopped. That tore it—some filthy hand on her sweet mouth. Morgan cut loose a long, driving left intended for the white blur of face somewhere in front of him. The blow didn't land, but the man who caught Morgan's arm from behind was carried forward, and Morgan spilled him over his left leg. But that was all. The one he'd tripped didn't let go when he fell but dragged Morgan down on top of him. When Morgan was yanked onto his feet, he'd acquired a man on either arm and one behind who prodded him with a gun. Four in all, counting the one in the cab with Nora. Five, if you included the very interested by-stander in the light coat ten or a dozen feet apart from the others.

Morgan asked: "Who's the strawboss over there?"

Nobody answered. The light coat pulled farther back into the murk. The man with the gun gave the orders.

"You know where to drop the girl. And get that hack out of here. Morgan, keep your big yap shut and start walking."

They started walking. Morgan got an impression of small shops crowded close together, close to the street, their windows dark. There was a smell of coal smoke, and somewhere far off to the left the sleepy chug of a switchyard engine carried through the rain. He stumbled off an alley curb, came down jarringly on his heels. The men on either side jerked him upright, and one of them uttered a low, amused laugh.

"You kinda wish you could pull a joe, don'tcha, chum? Kinda black out and then come to, so it's all a bad dream."

More of the same kind of laughter, the lack of caution it implied piling up his fear. They were taking him into the alley. Ahead, the light coat had led the way, but now it stopped and waited, maneuvered to keep its distance as Morgan was halted and yanked around. He knew that whatever this was, this was the time and place.

They held his arms, and the one who now stood in front made a sound like spitting on hands. Then the hands reached out tentatively, found exactly where he was, where his belly muscles quivered. And after that first short, hard driving blow that doubled Morgan over as far as they would let him go, he knew it couldn't last. Whatever it was, it couldn't last.

CHAPTER THREE

Homo Sapped

FINALLY, he stood up. It was an idea he'd considered carrying out for some little time. *Homo sapiens,* he reminded himself, was supposed to walk on the hind legs—not crawl. So Morgan stopped crawling through mud and water and over the high spots in the brick pavement and stood up. It wasn't too bad. He kept thinking amazedly that he'd taken worse lickings and had the use of his hands. A short while ago, in the crawling stage, he'd been sick at his stomach, but now that was gone, and nothing bothered him much except weakness and a dull driving pain in his head where, he suspected, somebody had kicked him.

They'd left him where he'd fallen, he decided. Greenlee Street would be that wedge of very dark gray at the end of the alley which was represented by some

very black black. He started toward Greenlee, not quite erect because cramps had set in across his middle. Twice he stumbled over uneven bricks and once collided with an ash barrel.

On Greenlee Street he turned west, took the three block hike to Morris Street and the nearest bus line. There were a few cars on Morris, and they looked very good to him, very civilized, but their drivers didn't pay any attention to his thumb. He probably didn't look like anything you'd want to see against your mohair. By the time he'd developed a blue-lipped chill, the one-seventeen bus came along. He hauled himself aboard and reeled to the back where he could sit and drip without drowning anybody.

Morgan had a two-room-and-bath flat up one flight from Adams on the gritty fringes of the downtown business district. The two dominant desires that got him up the stairs were a stiff drink and a hot shower. He was ten feet from his door when his phone started to ring. He thought poignantly of Nora Glidden, stumbled forward, but arrested his shaking hand three inches above the knob.

Inside Morgan's flat, somebody had picked up the phone. A male voice, nasal and abrasive, said hello, and then: "No, this is Sergeant Rice . . . He hasn't showed yet. We'll find him, don't you worry. It's only been about thirty-five minutes since you first notified the dispatcher."

Morgan twisted the knob, lurched into the room and to the left. "I want that, Ira," he said to the broad back of the man in the gray tweed coat who stood before the telephone stand. Ira Rice glanced over his shoulder and as Morgan reached, put the handset down on its stand and held it there. Morgan's hand fell limply to the side of his wet coat.

His eyes clashed with Rice's. "Well," he asked, "what is it, Ira?"

Rice took a a deep breath through wide nostrils that bristled with pale hair and turned from the phone. He was a man of about forty with shiny, red-apple cheeks and wild, graying-blond eyebrows.

He said: "Not a thing, Red. Miss Glidden reported you and she were waylaid in a cab on the way to the Glidden place. One of the men abducted her, and after riding around with her for a while, they let her out near the edge of town. She was worried about you." He smiled thinly. "She had us worried about you."

Morgan turned on his heel, walked to the other end of the room where an old model radio console stood against the wall. He pulled the radio out, reached in behind it, and took out a bottle of Bourbon. He uncorked it and drank, after which he said: "Not so damned worried they'd put a plainclothesman in my flat."

Rice spread big, big-veined hands. "Well, there is just a little more to it. Inspector Kerner would like to talk to you."

Morgan rammed the cork into the bottle with an angry blow from the heel of his palm. "What about?"

"Things," Ira Rice said smoothly. "Just . . . things. I got a car and a driver outside, Morgan. We'll go right away."

Morgan put the bottle away. "Mind if I change my clothes?"

"I don't," Rice said, "but I think Kerner would. You know Kerner. Always in a yank, Kerner is."

So Morgan didn't get a chance to peel off his soaked and mud-stained clothes, but went out and down the stairs with Rice and got into the back seat of an official car.

"Step on it," Rice ordered his driver. "You wouldn't care to elaborate on

things, I don't suppose?" Morgan asked as the car took a turn to the south.

Rice said: "Kerner don't tell me anything."

Morgan's own cigarettes were wet. He asked Rice for one, and Rice obliged and held a lighter. Then Morgan sank back into his corner, stared out through the window at the lights that streaked the darkness and tried to anticipate their destination. When the police car turned into one of the winding boulevards of the exclusive Windal region, he knew. They were headed for the Cope residence.

"Mrs Cope?" he wondered. Almost disinterestedly he wondered it, with no accompanying twinges. Ira Rice squirmed heavily and said Morgan ought to know better than to try and pump. That was as good as an affirmative answer. It was Gertrude Alder Cope, and somebody, finally, had got to her. Morgan hoped it wasn't Henry, though he couldn't think of anyone with a better motive for killing her.

They parked in the street—there were three cars in the drive—and walked across the lawn to the door. The police guard let them in. The hall with its shining fairy staircase seemed crowded or maybe it was only full of Inspector Ken Kerner—that rather short, completely bald man wih a stuffed, shapeless figure that looked as though it wouldn't bend and seldom did. Ira Rice sidled up to the inspector and handed him a slip of paper. Kerner looked at it a long time, and then his blue eyes came up, spearing Morgan.

"Well, lover," Kerner said.

NOBODY laughed. Morgan especially didn't laugh. He knew suddenly what the paper was that Rice had given Kerner. It would be that note which Gertrude Alder Cope had slipped under the door of his flat the night before—a note that carried her usual salutation, "lover", and asked him to come to her as soon as possible. He was way ahead of them now, and the ice on which he skated was white and thin. Kerner had been hard hit by the collapse of the Glidden machine, but while he was still in office he wouldn't hesitate to hit back, fair or foul, at the man who had wrecked the political organization behind his job.

Morgan swallowed past the dryness in his throat. He lifted a finger—he had only energy for that—to indicate the note in Kerner's hand. "Last night," he said. "And she called everybody lover." Except Henry, Morgan thought. Henry, she'd invariably called Cope—or sometimes, "Cope-it-rhymes-with-dope."

Kerner spread his best cat-in-the-cream-pitcher smile. "So you know it's Mrs. Cope who's dead. But naturally, Morgan. But naturally."

Morgan guessed he'd better keep his mouth shut.

They took him into the next room. It was the same, the same pattern repeated endlessly in mirrored walls—Gertrude Alder Cope in her black satin hostess gown that was right for her perfect figure and her pale gold hair. But she wasn't posing in one of the gold chairs, she wasn't striding back and forth. She still had the center of the stage, but she was lying on it, an inert and graceless heap against the beige carpet, her face bruised and puffy, not beautiful, with something that looked like coffee grounds matting the disarranged blond hair. There'd been a brawl. One of the bleached wood tables had been overturned, and ash tray and highball glass with it, a corner of one of the mirrors had a curved crack in it, the light chair that

always stood in front of the telephone now lay on its side in front of the plain, marble-faced fireplace.

Neither Kerner nor his men said anything for a while. They were watching Morgan's reaction which was one of sudden sickness. Except that he had previously emptied his stomach in the alley off Greenlee Street, he would have emptied it now. He reeled backward and when his legs caved, someone thoughtfully provided a chair to catch him. He gathered himself in, then gradually forced tautness down through his legs and out of his body. He relaxed, not looking at Gertrude Alder Cope.

Somebody—he wasn't sure it was Kerner—asked if he wanted to talk about it now. "Yes," he said dully. "Yes." So they were all ears, and somewhere a pencil scribbled as his low voice began with eleven o'clock at the Alibi taproom, then told of Nora Glidden coming there. They could check on that, he said. And Nora would tell them how they'd started in a cab for the Glidden place and had been waylaid in Greenlee Street by a herd of goons. No, he couldn't describe any of the goons because of the opaque quality of darkness you had in Greenlee Street. And that was eleven-thirty or maybe eleven-forty-five. Between that time and the time when he'd opened the door of his flat was the critical period. He couldn't give them much because there'd been an interval when he'd been physically and mentally out of this world. He'd ridden on a crowded bus, and maybe the driver would remember the dripping, muddy figure that got on at Greenlee and Morris.

And that was all. That was the whole and unadorned truth, and they didn't have to believe it if they didn't want to.

Kerner didn't want to. Standing in front of Morgan, feet spread apart and firmly anchored in the high pile of the carpet, his thighs like those cylindrical sofa cushions that had once been the vogue, he gave out with his own and highly imaginative version.

Kerner would accept Morgan's story all the way up to the Greenlee Street incident. "But that couldn't have been much of a brawl, Morgan. They left your face alone." And when Morgan wordlessly indicated the painful swelling on the side of his head, Kerner nodded and said Morgan could have picked that up right here in this room. The inspector turned to a little table from which he took something wrapped in muslin—a faceless, modern statuette in white marble and about ten inches high. There were pale blond hairs clinging to the blood that crusted it.

"The *real* brawl," Kerner said, "was right here, between you and your ladylove, there. Mr. Cope was a busy man. Plenty of opportunity for you and Mrs. Cope to play games."

"Oh, for cripesake." Morgan sighed it out wearily.

"Suppose you feel for somebody else," Kerner speculated. "Say, for Nora Glidden. And you came here tonight to break off with Mrs. Cope. She wouldn't sit still for it. She started throwing things. You grabbed this chunk of marble and clubbed her with it."

Morgan stared dully at the murder instrument and shook his head.

"We don't savvy sign language. Talk, Morgan."

Morgan drew a breath that didn't go down to where he needed it. He said, "All right," and began again with eleven o'clock at the Alibi. Because he had made consistency a habit, he could repeat the same story he was stuck with without variation.

Kerner didn't wait for him to finish.

"Where's your ring, your ring—" as Morgan appeared not to understand. "The one with the raised gold initial. I remember it from when you were around headquarters as police reporter."

Morgan couldn't see where his ring fitted into the picture. He said, "It's in my pocket," and started groping for it. He always took his ring off when he saw a fight piling up in front of him. He always had, since that first time when he'd socked an ugly tempered lush and the inner edge of the ring had cut his finger.

But the ring wasn't in his pocket. When he told them he didn't have it, Kerner wasn't at all surprised. Kerner showed him where it fitted in and why Morgan would naturally dispose of it. Kerner got him up out of the chair and forced him over to where Gertrude Alder Cope lay. Kerner pointed to the dead woman's face, to a certain bruise beneath her left cheekbone—a puffy, bluish mark, a letter *M*.

"Your brand, Morgan," Kerner said, his voice soft in triumph. "You couldn't erase that, could you? So you threw away the ring."

Morgan's eyes lived in a stiff, dead face. They looked steadily at Kerner. "It's a frame," he said, "and I think you know it, Kerner."

Kerner might have hit him then, but he didn't—quite. He turned the blow into a kind of spin that carried him around, and the fist that didn't land produced a finger that jabbed at Ira Rice.

"Take him downtown. We'll see what he looks like under a thousand watt lamp."

Ira moved in, almost reluctantly, took hold of Morgan's arm. They moved together into the hall. The door of Henry Cope's den was open, and Henry was in there with still another cop. Sighting Morgan, Henry came forward in his chair, small eyes shiny.

"Red—" He left it there like that, as though there was a lot more to say and he couldn't say it. He hid his small face in spidery hands.

CHAPTER FOUR

Overdose of Murder

THE following morning, Ira Rice came down into the cool-off cells at headquarters and unlocked Morgan's. There was a smile lurking around the sergeant's lips somewhere; you had to look carefully for it, but it was there.

"How you feeling, Red?"

Morgan, hunched over on the edge of the bunk, propped up burning eyelids. He asked: "How would you feel?"

Rice's laugh was embarrassed. "Let's not be bitter. You got a writ. You got friends in the damndest places."

Morgan didn't stir from the cot, but watched Ira steadily. "On the level now, what killed Hillary Glidden?"

"You had it on the level, Red. Heart attack. Glidden had been taking digitalis regularly for his heart, and while an overdose can kill, I guess, he didn't get an overdose."

Morgan thought; *But you can't hear a heart attack over a telephone.* You couldn't, for that matter, hear anybody commit suicide by taking digitalis either. Yet Gertrude Alder Cope had known when she'd turned from the phone that Glidden was dead.

Morgan asked: "Kerner's got a way around that suicide note? Something besides just ignoring it for political expediency?"

The sergeant nodded. "That was a phony."

"You mean because of the blot on the note but not on the desk blotter?"

"No, though that's something we've got to work on—that blot. The signature was genuine, the typing the work of Glidden's typewriter there at the house. There were even some pretty good fingerprints. But when we put the note under black light, the whole thing showed up phony. There'd been a lot of other names on that sheet of paper—a whole column of them. Big names. But the signatures were forged. We got in touch with some of the men whose names were in the list and none of them had signed anything like that. All phony down to Glidden's—which was at the end. Somebody presented Glidden with a petition, we figure, a petition for something that had been typed across the top of a sheet of legal paper and later trimmed off so that the sheet was letter size. All the phony names were removed by means of ink eradicator, leaving the genuine Glidden signature."

"All right," Morgan said, as though nothing was all right. "Why plant a phony suicide note at the scene of natural death?"

Ira shrugged and looked away. "What was that you said a while ago about political expediency? That would pull a lot of band-wagon votes away from MacAlear and to Thurlow."

Morgan grunted. "Damned poor timing for anything like that. Anyway, a phony suicide note like that would take a little while to prepare. How the hell would anybody know that Glidden was going to live up to it and just conveniently kick off?"

Ira coughed. "Maybe you didn't hear what I said a while ago. You've got a writ. You'd better get out of here before somebody finds a way to make a permanent place for you up-state."

Morgan stood up and stretched. He'd developed muscles, all of them sore. He moved out into the corridor and Ira Rice followed him upstairs and then conducted him to the desk where he would sign a receipt for his personal belongings. Vance Pauling, the sedate, silver-haired man who had been Hillary Glidden's attorney, was standing beside the desk, and he gave Morgan a wintry smile. A little bit on the fringe of things, big Ray Egan stood with hands in the pockets of his overcoat and frowned absently at the wall.

"Hello, Comptroller," Morgan said, turning to Egan.

Egan's round face flushed. For a moment he considered Morgan with muddy eyes. "That's a little premature, isn't it?"

Morgan thought that it was. He said acidly: "About a hundred years premature, Ray." And then he picked up the desk sergeant's pencil and signed the receipt.

"Some guys," Ira Rice said wonderingly, "never learn."

Morgan laughed as he scooped up his wallet and loose change from the sergeant's desk. "Some guys are habitually consistent."

He left the building walking between Ray Egan and Vance Pauling.

On the sidewalk in front of the police building, Pauling mumbled something about having to be in court, gave Morgan his frost-bitten smile, turned hurriedly and walked north. Egan took a hand out of a pocket and thumbed with it toward a black Caddy parked across the street—Glidden's car. The swarthy profile of the man behind the wheel belonged to Glidden's chauffeur.

"Nora wants to see you," Egan said, sullen about it.

They jay-walked, got into the Caddy

from the street side and the chauffeur nursed the big car out into traffic.

"Maybe," Ray Egan said, his face set, eyes straight ahead, "I ought to explain this was Nora's idea."

"Meaning you and I can go right on hating each other's guts, huh?"

"Meaning just what I said. Nora wanted you sprung." Then with a slumping movement that involved his whole body and managed to convey the idea that they needn't talk anymore, Egan settled himself into his corner, as far from Morgan as possible, his hands deep in his pockets.

"All this and heaven too," Morgan mused. It wasn't anything that required a reply, and he didn't get one. Then he asked: "Was Hillary Glidden going to take up those Northleigh sewer bonds at face value, Egan?"

Egan turned his head toward Morgan. Egan, caught without his frown, looked almost infantile. "Wh-why would he do do that?" he stammered.

Morgan shrugged. "Maybe as a sort of magnificent gesture to prove he was on the square. I can't think of anything else. It wouldn't have got him anywhere politically."

The frown came back. It was deep and real. "Where'd you get that notion, Morgan?"

Morgan couldn't think of any reason for not telling Egan that Gertrude Alder Cope had put the idea into his head. No reason, except that Gertrude Alder Cope was dead, very dead, and he, Morgan, counted himself as still among the living.

He said: "You didn't answer my question."

Egan shook his head. "No, Glidden wasn't going to do that. He couldn't possibly have afforded it, for one thing." He tipped forward on the edge of the cushion and tapped the wooden Indian at the wheel. "Drop by my place, Lonny. Just run around into the parking lot at the back."

SOMETHING stirred uneasily in Morgan's mind. He watched Egan settle back in the seat. Egan said, as though it was pretty much of an afterthought: "I want to pick up some cigarettes." He almost smiled.

Ahead was Lister Avenue, not another car within a block, and the traffic light was shifting from amber to red. As the Caddy braked at the yellow line, Morgan put a hand out toward the door handle. He said: "I think I'd like to pick up some cigarettes, too."

With a swiftness that approached panic, Egan's right hand moved out of a pocket and closed on Morgan's arm, fingers digging deep into aching muscle. Morgan looked back over his shoulder at the round face. Egan's lips formed a watery smile.

"I've got plenty of cigarettes for both of us. Besides, Lonny has a wrench. Haven't you, Lonny?"

"Yeah." The chauffeur was leaning far to the left, and Morgan saw a shiny narrow eye watching him in the rear view mirror. "And would I like to bend said wrench over that stinker's head."

Morgan eased back against the cushion. The hand on his shoulder relaxed a little. The smile traded for the habitual frown. Morgan preferred the frown.

"Frankly," Egan said, "I want to talk with you, Morgan."

"Then what's the matter with right here?" Morgan asked as the car swung to the right onto Lister. "If Nora Glidden is paying for the groceries. we'd better deliver without any loitering along the way. What's on your mind, Egan?"

Egan moistened his lips. He looked like a man who'd inadvertently showed

his hole card to everybody around the table. "Well, I'd just like to know where you got that half-baked idea that Glidden was going to pick up those bonds, that's all."

Morgan grunted. "It's just something I've been kicking around. It's what I'd have done in Glidden's place if I'd been caught without my pants and my underwear didn't look too clean."

Egan took his hand off Morgan's shoulder and shoved it back into his pocket. He shook his head. "Glidden couldn't. Couldn't have afforded it." Mouth sulky, he stared at the back of Lonny's head in silence for a while, and then: "I poke around a little, too, Morgan. Under logs, you might say. You see some funny things. Some damned funny things."

"Such as?"

"Such as the Phoenix Development Campany. Ever head of it?" And when Morgan shook his head, Egan said: "Phoenix Development recently acquired title to the whole half-section of stinkhole known as Walker Slough out toward Northleigh. I got curious and, as I said, started poking under logs. Guess what crawled out from under the one tagged the Phoenix Development Company."

Morgan's lips moved stiffly. "You don't have to tell me." He could remember now who it was who had ripped into the city council for annexing the Northleigh area, including the slough, and who had branded the slough as a malarial hole and a quicksand trap for wandering children. The same person who, much later, had given Morgan the tip that if he looked into the Northleigh sewer situation he might find the ammunition with which to blast the Glidden machine.

"Henry Cope."

Morgan looked ahead through the windshield and nodded. "I said you didn't have to tell me."

"What the hell he'd want with Walker Slough, I don't know."

"Maybe," Morgan mused. "he wanted his wife. Maybe that was all he wanted. It'd be quite a lot at that." He saw they were going to draw another red light at the intersection. There were a trolley bus and three cars already at the yellow line.

"His wife?" Egan puzzled. "Is that what you said?"

Morgan didn't answer. He watched Lonny thread the Caddy into the narrow lane between the bus and the line of cars to the right. He'd been counting on that. He glanced at Egan and then out at the trolley bus. He smiled slightly.

"If Lonny tosses a wrench around here, he's apt to break a lot of glass. Shall I start yelling, or can I get out and get my cigarettes now?"

An anxious shadow moved across Egan's round face, but he didn't lift a hand to prevent Morgan from getting out . . .

He found Henry Cope at home and alone. The little man said he was glad to see Morgan and then, with a little shiver that might have been nervousness or the proximity of the room in which Gertrtude Alder Cope had died, he turned and darted ahead into what his wife had always referred to as "Henry's den." Possibly the idea of Henry's needing a place to growl had appealed to her sense of the absurd. Once inside, Henry closed the door and turned, glare from the picture window striking across his glasses. His smile was tentative.

"Red, last night—" He gulped.

"Yes, what about last night?" Morgan sat down in one of the leather chairs and hooked an ankle over a knee. He noticed

Henry staring at the left sleeve of Morgan's coat.

"Is—is that blood?"

Morgan pulled the sleeve around, looked at the dark brown streak against the gray cloat, touched it with a fingesr tip. He nodded. "You can find anything on this coat. But anything . . . What about last night?"

HENRY sat down uneasily, spread his spidery hands on his thighs. His fingers pattered. "I mean, I overheard all of those accusations Kerner was piling onto you last night. They —well, none of them are true . . ." His smile flicked. "Of course you know that. What I'm trying to say is that Kerner didn't have any help from me. I never put any such notion into his head."

"You mean about . . . Gertrude and me," Morgan said.

"Yes. Those insinuations—"

"Accusations. You had it right the first time . . . No, I know you didn't have anything to do with that." Morgan helped himself to Henry's cigarettes. When he'd lighted one, he said: "I'm in a kind of a hole, Henry. Could you lend me a twenty?"

Henry almost wriggled with pleasure. He got up, took out his billfold, and came over to where Morgan was seated. "Sure that's enough? I can let you have a hundred right now."

Morgan reached up and out and took Henry's billfold out of Henry's hand. While Henry stared, Morgan took out a small blotter from the wallet. The blotter carried the October calendar and a bank advertisement on its smooth side. Morgan flipped it over to the brown, absorbent surface, and then looked up.

For a moment, Henry's face was only amazed. Then alarm spread its pallor from the corners of Henry's mouth high into his cheeks. Morgan wagged a finger across a heavy blot that, to his eye, resembled a cat with arched back, bristling tail, but minus the head.

Morgan said: "You can see the last two letters of Hillary Glidden's signature, too." He shook his head. "That can get you into a little trouble, Henry."

Henry said: "I—I know." He backed to the chair and sank into it, small and crumpled. "Now I know. I didn't think about it until now."

"Down at headquarters, they say somebody got out a phony petition with a lot of phony names on it and got Glidden to add his to the list. Then the somebody trimmed off the petitioning paragraph at the top, bleached out all the names except Glidden's, and typed in the suicide note on Glidden's typewriter."

Morgan inhaled smoke thoughtfully. "Down at headquarters, they've got everything for a phony suicide set-up and every medical indication of natural death. The two won't mix. It's *got* to be murder. There *has* to have been a gun shot—something that your wife could hear over the phone."

Henry took a quick breath. He opened his mouth but didn't speak. He looked, Morgan thought, very foolish with his mouth hanging open like that.

"I think Glidden phoned your wife to tell her he was going to take up the Northleigh sewer bonds."

"He—he may have," Henry said.

"And that's when the murderer came into Glidden's house. Glidden left the phone, went to see who it was. We don't know how much Gertrude heard through that open phone. But then—" Morgan shrugged, "neither did the murderer. He didn't discover the open phone until after the job was done. And then he had to take care of your wife."

Henry took off his glasses and toyed nervously with their bows. "But why—why didn't Gertrude tell somebody? If she knew—if she heard—"

Morgan smiled slightly. "Let's leave it like this: she didn't hear Glidden name the killer. All she heard was the shot. Because if you thought she died protecting you, you'd feel like a louse, wouldn't you?"

Henry groaned. "My lord, yes. Because I—I didn't kill Glidden. I was there, but I didn't kill him. I don't—I can't even believe he *was* murdered."

"But you were going to kill him, weren't you, to keep him from getting hold of those bonds?"

Henry nodded. "The—the suicide note . . . But you know how I worked that. It wasn't a note then. It was just Glidden's signature on a piece of paper. I was counting on typing the note itself on Glidden's typewriter *after* I'd killed him. I went there that night knowing that Glidden would be alone. I'd read in the society column that his daughter would be at some function at the MacAlears'. But just as I was approaching the house on foot, I saw Glidden leaving also on foot. When he'd got out of sight, I went up to the door and found it unlocked. So I figured Glidden had just gone down to the mailbox, or some trivial errand like that, and would soon be back.

"I went into the house, into Glidden's study, and typed the 'suicide' note, left it on the desk, and then went into the hall where I thought I'd surprise Glidden when he came in. But he didn't come and he didn't come. It—it was terrible, Red, waiting for the man I intended to kill. I began to get the shakes. I began to picture him walking in that front door, and I began to get a sort of buck fever. I was afraid I'd just freeze there.

HENRY put his glasses on, blinked owlishly through them. "I went into the living room and started to look around for a place of concealment, and then I opened the door of the lavatory, and—he was there. Glidden. On the floor, dead, that bottle of digitalis beside him."

Morgan said flatly: "That's fine."

The tentative smile again. "How do you mean that?"

"I mean, all this would sound fine on the witness stand. First you see Glidden leave the house, and then, without opening a door, he's back in, dead on the floor of the lavatory. That wasn't Glidden you saw leave. That was the murderer."

Henry gulped and nodded. "That—that's what I decided. Not right then, because then I couldn't think. If I'd thought, I'd have picked up that 'suicide' note before I left the house. Later, when I got to thinking back . . . Well, how *can* I say anything about it now?"

"I see your point," Morgan said without enthusiasm. "But when I take a look at your motive, I can't see a single damned reason why the hell I should protect a little slug like you. Glidden was going to take up those Northleigh sewer bonds at face value, wasn't he? He was going to be a square guy. After the *Times* blasted the Northleigh sewer, the land owners out there wouldn't pay a dime of the two hundred thousand assessed against their property. You'd already knocked the value down with your little story about the dangers of living in the Walker Slough area. Rather than pour their money into a worthless sewer, the owners would have defaulted, would have let the land go back to the city, and you'd have acquired it for a dime on the dollar."

Henry Cope's lips trembled. "That—

that's it. Glidden was going to do just that. He told me so, wanted me to put the story of his intentions on the front page. When he didn't see the story, he must have called Gertrude about it." Henry shook his head wearily. "It—it wasn't the money, Red. I just wanted to pull one smart move on my own that would prove to Gertrude I had at least a modicum of intelligence. It was the kind of a stunt that would make her have a little respect for me. Walker Slough is filled with rare botanicals—raw material for the manufacture of many costly and essential drug items. I know. I've taken specimens to the university. There's a big pharmaceutical house in Detroit that will locate a plant in Northleigh the day I show them the obvious advantages. They'll need land on which to erect their plant, land for the houses of their employees—"

Henry broke off. For a moment, his enthusiasm for his scheme had made him forget his objective was not now attainable. His smile was limp. He said again: "It wasn't the money, Red. You understand that? It—it was Gertrude."

"Sure," Morgan said quietly. It must have been tough for Henry to have loved Gertrude passionately and always to have been an object of her scorn. Cope-it-rhymes-with-dope—that was what she'd called him.

Morgan stood up, returned Henry Cope's wallet, but retained the blotter. He said: "But you're going to have to tell all this in court. You're going to have to identify the man you saw leaving Glidden's house that night. Remember, he killed Gertrude and framed me for the job. Kerner can't see around that frame. He'll keep working on it until it'll hold me."

Henry, his small eyes fixed on a point in space, nodded. "How did the killer manage to get hold of your ring, Red?"

Morgan laughed. "But easy with four men to help him. Maybe the four just thought they were beating me because of what they felt I'd done to Glidden, but the ring was the thing. Kind of a two-edged sword, though, that ring of mine. It cuts both ways if you sock anybody with the fist that's wearing it. The wearer gets a nasty little cut up close to the knuckle where it doesn't heal readily. The first and only time it cut me like that, the cut would open up and start to bleed every time I'd clench my fist."

Morgan pulled the sleeve of his coat around, tapped the bloody smear on the cloth with his finger. "That's where Ray Egan grabbed me a little while ago. How does that sound, Henry?"

Henry looked up, mouth lax. He drew a shallow breath. "Sure. Sure it was Egan I saw. Hillary Glidden was built a whole lot like Egan."

Morgan nodded thoughtfully. "But how the hell did he kill Glidden? We've got every indication of natural death. A heart attack. But you can't hear a heart attack over a telephone. We haven't a thing against Egan except a cut on his finger that he keeps trying to conceal by shoving his hands in his pockets. He will have disposed of my ring by now."

Henry said bewilderedly: "But why, Red? Why should Egan kill Glidden?"

"The same motive, with a slightly different twist—to prevent Glidden from paying off those sewer bonds. That accounts for both of you going after Glidden the same night. I think Egan is engaged to Nora Glidden because it was Nora who got Egan to spring me. Hating me as Egan does, Nora would have to have threatened to break off the engagement to get Egan to do that. Egan

couldn't lose all this and heaven too. Egan isn't going to get the lucrative job as city comptroller. We stopped that when we stopped Glidden. And if Glidden exhausted his financial resources to square things for the sewer swindle, Egan would be getting a pauper's daughter."

Henry mulled that over for a moment, but he didn't seem to get anywhere. "What are you going to do, Red?"

Morgan moved over to the door. He said: "I don't know. Get Egan someway, though. I've got to, before he gets me. We make each other nervous."

CHAPTER FIVE

Scared to Death

THERE was crepe on the Glidden door, but the mourners were where Glidden's body lay, in the funeral home. A good-looking Negro maid answered Morgan's ring and explained that Nora Glidden had gone to the mortician's establishment but was expected back. Morgan said that Nora Glidden had sent for him and that he'd come in and wait. The maid took Morgan's coat and hat, conducted him into the living room, and then went about her business in the rear of the house.

Morgan sat down in one of the big, comfortable lounge chairs, and his eyes went on tour about the room. He still clung stubbornly to the notion that Gertrude Alder Cope must have heard a shot, but there was nothing that resembled a bullet hole on the warm gray painted plaster walls. The white enamel on the wood trim was flawless. His gaze shifted to the limestone-faced fireplace. It was empty, clean of ash, no gouges in either stone or blackened firebrick lining.

Morgan lighted a cigarette, leaned back, and stared at the ceiling. Shock had killed Glidden. He'd been literally scared to death, and it had showed on his dead face. And whatever had frightened him to such an extent that his already weak heart had collapsed had been audible over the telephone. You still came back to a gun shot. Put a gun to a man's head, explain in detail the reason for killing him, give it a terrific build-up, and then fire—not into your victim, but somewhere else where the bullet would be concealed . . .

He got up suddenly, went to the fireplace, and knelt on the hearth. His fingers were trembling as they went out to the hinged steel plate that covered the top of the ash pit. He raised the plate, felt along its lower edge. There was a perceptible indentation.

Morgan straightened up, went through French doors into the dining room, opened a swinging door, looked into the kitchen. He located the basement stairway, and went on down into the furnace room. He found a metal ash barrel, moved it over to the fireplace cleanout, opened the cast iron door. Gray wood ash puffed out in his face. He began digging the ash out with his hands, sifting it through his fingers.

He found the slug sooner than he had anticipated, and it was badly mushroomed. At the instant that he was blowing ash from the piece of lead, he heard footsteps and hushed voices in the rooms above his head. The maid's voice, than Nora's, then Ray Egan's. Tiny pin points of sweat came out on the palms of Morgan's hands as he recognized Egan's heavy tread first in the kitchen, then on the basement stairs. Morgan's quick step carried him to the side of the furnace. His right hand lifted off the cast iron shaker handle. His left held the bit of lead.

Egan faltered in the doorway of the furnace room. His muddy eyes touched Morgan, then moved to the door of the ash pit. His right hand was in the pocket of dark, chalk-stripe trousers.

Morgan tossed and caught the bullet. When he spoke, his voice was low, steady. "I've got it all doped out, Egan, method and motive. Glidden had a heart attack, all right, induced by shock. He actually died in the living room, but you carried the body to the lavatory, planted the bottle of digitalis to make it appear as though Glidden had felt the attack coming on and had tried to take a dose of his medicine."

Egan took a step forward, stopped. He moistened his lips, his gaze fixed on Morgan's left hand. "Give me that."

"Come and get it."

"All right." Egan pulled a gun out of his pocket. The cut that Morgan's ring had left was visible close to the last knuckle of the ring finger. As Egan's hand clutched the butt of the gun, the cut started to bleed. He took three steps toward Morgan, cleared his throat.

"Thinking, Egan?" Morgan said. "You'd better. It'll take a lot of killing to clean this up from here on. You'll have to get me. You'll probably have to get Nora and the maid. And you'd better get Henry Cope, too, because he saw you leave this house night before last after you'd killed Glidden. That's a lot of killing and a damned short time to do it in. You'll never make it."

Egan said: "I'm going to try." And then he listened to the tack-tack of slim heels on the floor of the next room.

"Ray." Nora's voice. "Bill—did you find the gas leak?"

She was standing in the door now, a trim little figure in a tailored gray suit. She couldn't see Ray Egan's gun, but there was something in the attitude of the two men, something in the high strung silence, that told her how things were. She swooped suddenly toward Egan. And Egan fired.

It must have been Nora's sudden rush that deflected Egan's aim, because as he had fired, Morgan was already on the move with the shaker handle raised. No bullet stopped him. Possibly no bullet could have stopped him with Nora Glidden's name next on the murder schedule. The blow landed somewhere on the left side of Egan's head, and Egan dropped to the floor, his gun still clenched in his bleeding right hand.

Nora tottered. Morgan caught her, and he thought: *Now I've taken everything away from you. Everything you loved and everything you thought worth loving.*

THEY buried Hillary Glidden that dreary Saturday afternoon. Sunday night, with the dog-watch hush hanging heavily over the *Times* editorial office, Morgan came up to his cubicle, opened the door, went in, and turned on the green-shaded desk lamp. A blank piece of paper drooped from his typewriter. He dumped his lank body into the chair, lit a cigarette, smoked it thoughtfully down to an inch and a half before his jerky, three-fingered typing spattered the quiet with sound.

> Rain fell out of the gray October sky above Woodlawn Cemetery. It fell with typical impartiality on the mayor, the chief-of-police, and the wrinkled face of the old woman from the Polish quarter where it was not distinguishable from her tears. They had come to bury Caesar. Whether or not he was good for his people, Hillary Glidden was loved.

And there Morgan was stuck. He lit another cigarette, got up from the desk, and turned to the window. He looked out

and across the dark toward the lights on Wheeling Hill. There were, he thought, a lot of lights, a lot of people. And, bitterly, he thought, a lot of homes.

Sound came from the doorway—a light, almost timid step. He glanced over a shoulder and there she was. Nora. Like a dream thinly veiled by the smoke that layered beneath the lamp. He swallowed.

"Hello, Bill."

"Nora."

She came in, her smile not quite sure of anything, her eyes sober. He didn't leave the window, but watched her, as though watching her was enough. He looked down at his desk, not knowing where to look, and her father's name caught her eye. She lifted the sheet of paper that hung from the typewriter, read what he had written. She raised her eyes to him then, and they were shiny with tears.

She said: "That's—lovely, Bill."

"It isn't finished. When it is, it'll—well, it'll be on the level."

She nodded. "Sincere. It couldn't be anything else." Then she came over to where he stood, looking out the window with him and toward Wheeling Hill.

"A lot of people," he said. "And their city. It's theirs, if they can keep it."

"Ours, too, Bill."

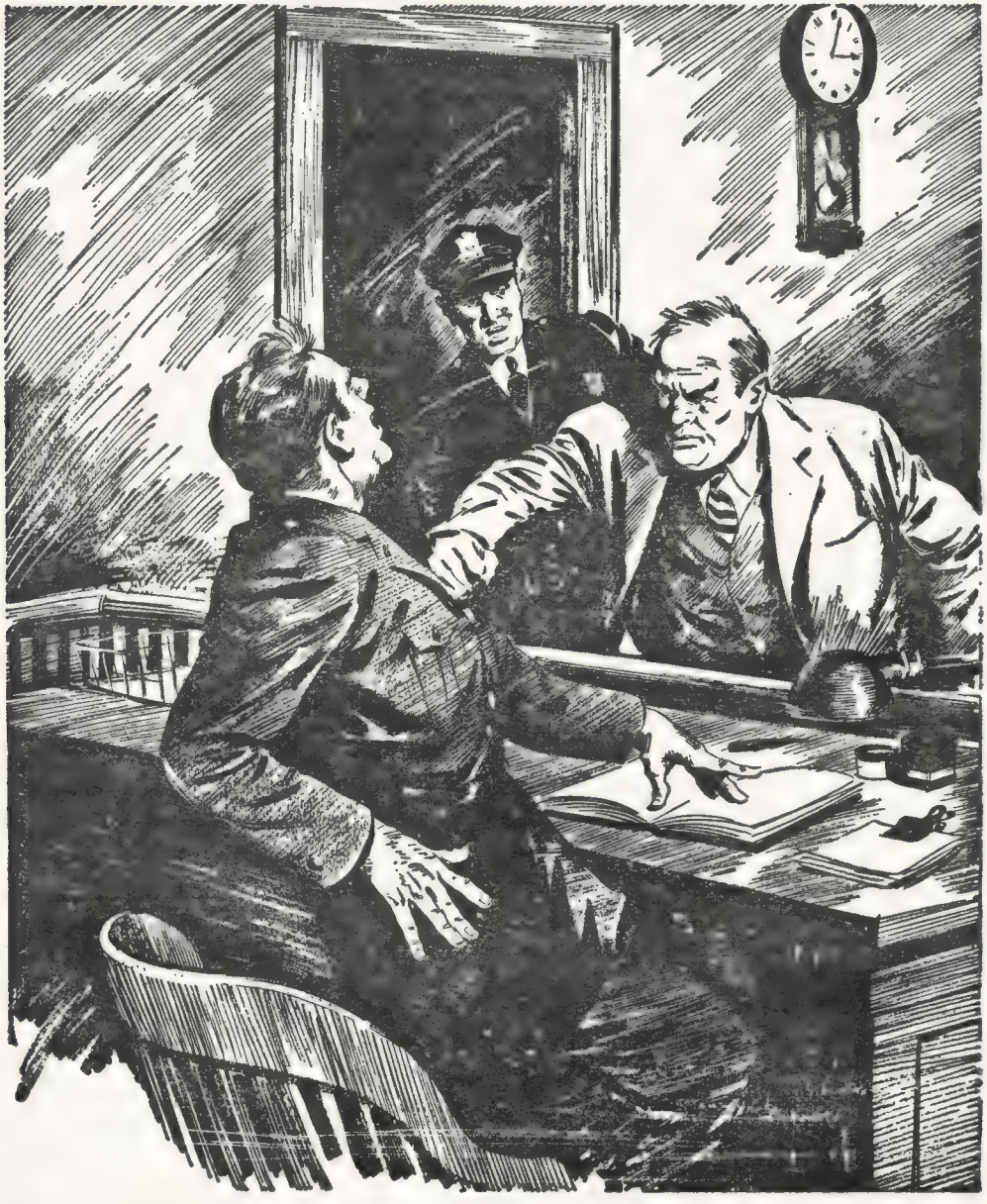
His hands moved suddenly to the window lift, raised the sash. The chill draft drew the city into them, the smells of the city.

"Coal smoke," he said.

"Incense, Bill."

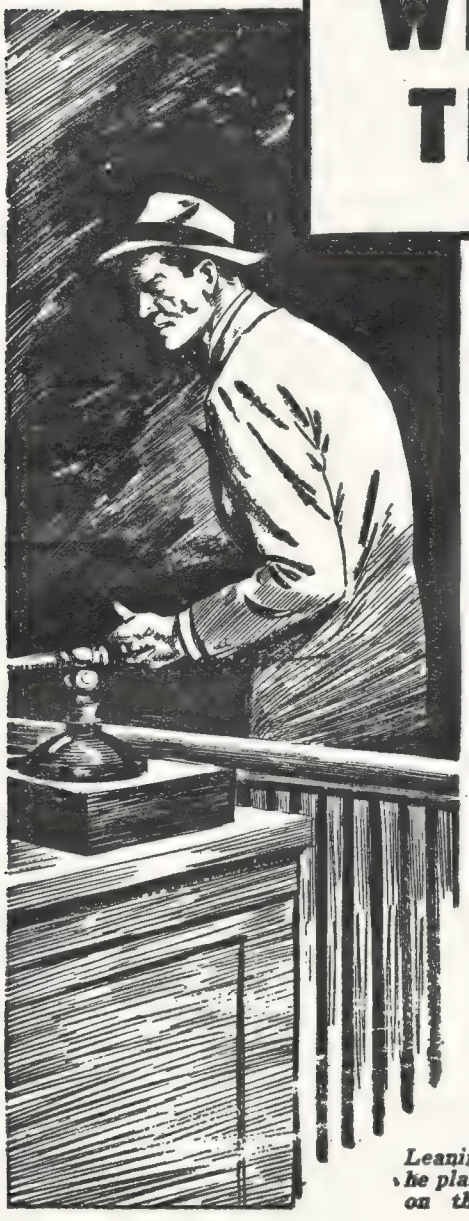
"Yes." But you had to be in love with cities to call it that. Or you had to be in love.

'Twas mighty odd for my satanic fat friend Longstreet to be swearing oaths on a sacred locket—oaths which would surely send him straight to hell. But perhaps that was the idea.



By
RICHARD
DEMING

THE MAN WHO CHOSE THE DEVIL



WHEN I thought about it afterward, it seemed the fat man must have been puzzled that I paid no attention to his standing on my foot. But I was actually unaware of it until I tried to slide off the bar stool and found one foot pinned to the floor.

Of course he didn't realize there was no feeling in my right limb, that instead of flesh it was an intricate contrivance of cork and aluminum strapped to a

Leaning across the rail, he planted his fist squarely on the sergeant's nose.

stump below my knee. The government paid me $180.00 a month for not having a right leg. They were also going to buy me a brand new car—when they got around to it.

Just before I tried to leave my stool, I caught a glimpse of Anton Strowlski in the bar mirror. The dapper gunman approached with one hand negligently carried in the pocket of his tailored suitcoat. Since I had never rubbed against Anton, I knew he wasn't looking for me, but I automatically grow observant when gunmen, even friendly gunmen, get behind me with their hands in their pockets.

Anton's expression was casual, his eyes on no one in particular. But something in the face of the fat man standing next to me, as it was reflected in the bar mirror, caused me to shift my glance from the gunman to him. The fat man's face was expressionless, but his eyes unwinkingly followed the image of Anton Strowlski.

It was then I decided to move from my stool. Not that I expected anything to happen in as public a place as the Jefferson Lounge, but some inbred caution prompted me to want a large section of the Jefferson's air-conditioned atmosphere wedged between myself and the fat man. And I found myself stuck to the floor.

The fat man stood half-faced away from me, his left elbow propped on the bar and his left foot solidly crushing the full weight of his two hundred forty pounds on my right shoe. With one eye still on Anton, I tapped his arm.

The gesture caught Anton's attention and he flashed me a quick glance, nodded in recognition and made an abrupt right wheel toward the far end of the bar.

Without moving his body, the fat man turned at me a florid face which would have meant a fortune to a burlesque comedian. High-domed, round-cheeked and pug-nosed, and with bright, heavy lidded eyes over which satanic eyebrows arched upward at the ends, instead of down, it was the face of a rollicking satyr.

I pointed at the floor. "If you don't mind, I'll take my foot with me."

His lips drew back over dazzling mail order teeth, and a chuckle worked its way up from his gargantuan paunch, coming out baritone and amused. Without moving his foot, he turned his back.

I BEGAN to get sore, but not enough to slug him. The Jefferson Lounge frowns on commotion. It even frowns if you drop your money on the bar instead of laying it down noiselessly. It features organ music and quietness, apparently ashamed of being a saloon and trying to disguise the truth under a church-like atmosphere. I tapped my fat drinking mate again.

"Your foot is on mine," I explained clearly.

"I know." He turned his back again.

"Move it," I said to his back, without raising my voice.

His big head swivelled at me for the third time. Satanic brows quirked upward and his ready made incisors sparkled again.

"You move it."

His bright eyes glinted mischievously, completely lacking the contentiousness of a stew picking a fight. I saw he was dead sober, yet for some reason, which I vaguely linked with the presence of Anton Strowlski, was deliberately trying to start a scene. So I gave him one.

Sliding my stool to the left, I let the side of my chest drop across it, grasping the seat with both hands for support. Rapidly crossing my left leg over my

right until the sole of my foot rested against the inside of his far knee, I pushed.

His right leg buckled, throwing him off balance, and he grabbed at the bar with both hands. At the same time he involuntarily moved the foot imprisoning mine a step backward. Snapping erect, I smashed the heel of my released right foot into the underside of his left knee. He sat down with a crash that shook the room and stopped the organist in the middle of a bar.

With surprising agility for a fat man, he bounced to his feet and swung a roundhouse at my head. In a brawl, I watch a man's eyes. His showed no anger, only an increased mischievous joy. My knees bent and his fist whistled a foot over my hair.

He was easy. One short jab in that soft stomach jackknifed him forward with his jaw conveniently out-thrust. When he hit the floor this time, he stayed there and slept.

I looked up from his sprawled body just in time to see Anton Strowlski let the street door swing closed behind him.

You simply do not brawl in the Jefferson Lounge. Fatso was hardly asleep before a cop had me by either arm. I think the management keeps cops under the bar, along with ice-cubes and lemons.

When they finally got Fatso awake, they put us both in a prowl car. The Jefferson's manager stood at the curb wringing his hands and looking horrified.

"No charges, officer," he kept saying. "Just take them away."

The older of the two cops said testily: "All right. All right," and the manager moved away.

The Jefferson Lounge is situated in one corner of the elaborate Jefferson Hotel. As the Lounge manager passed back into his dispensary, I noticed Anton Strowlski a few yards up the street under the hotel marquee. With his back against the brick wall near the main entrance, he watched us broodingly. I recognized our driver, a stocky, middle-aged cop, without being able to recall his name. I know most men on the force, at least by sight. The other cop was young and unfamiliar, probably a rookie.

The driver twisted in his seat to look us over. Fatso was shaking his head and working his jaw back and forth with one hand.

"You're Manny Moon, aren't you?" the driver said to me.

"Yeah."

"Who are you?" he asked my sparring partner.

"Willard Longstreet." The fat man turned to me. "Manville Moon, are you? The private dick?"

I nodded shortly.

"What you hit me with?"

"With great enjoyment, you big ape."

HE GRINNED his satyr grin and mischievous brightness returned to his eyes. He fixed them on the driver.

"What are your plans, cop?"

The policeman frowned. "They were to let you go, if you promise to behave. But I don't like 'cop'."

"I want Moon booked for assault and battery," Longstreet said calmly. "Drive along."

"Why you . . . !" I started to say, then stopped and relaxed. "Go along," I told the driver.

Shrugging, the cop faced forward and started the motor. I glanced over at Anton once more, saw him frown at us worriedly, and on a spur of the moment impulse decided to make the party complete.

"Hold it!" I told the driver.

Gears clashed as the driver, starting to release the clutch, suddenly braked and slipped back into neutral. Locking the emergency, he peered at me in the rear-view mirror.

"Now what?"

I said: "The guy standing under the hotel marquee is Anton Strowlski. Know him?"

Both cops glanced that way and both shook their heads.

"Chicago boy. Even money you'll find a gun if you shake him down."

Anton, noting our eyes on him, began to move away slowly. Swinging open his door, the younger cop bounced from the car.

"You!" he called.

Pretending not to hear, Anton increased his pace. The cop legged after him, drawing his service revolver as he ran.

"Halt, or I'll shoot!"

The command improved Anton's hearing and he stopped dead in his tracks and turned. The cop gestured toward the building with his gun and Anton, familiar with the routine through much previous experience, faced the wall with his hands elevated about to shoulder height.

Deftly running his free hand over the gunman's body, the policeman relieved him of a dainty, snub-nosed automatic. He found it in the same pocket Anton's hand had occupied when I first glimpsed him in the mirror.

Reholstering his revolver, the cop let Anton precede him back to the car. Without a word the gunman took his place in the rear seat between Longstreet and me.

As we made our second start, I said: "Who you working for these days, Strowlski?"

Eyes brittle as broken glass swung to my face. He ignored my question. "You finger me, Moon?"

"Mister Moon," I said.

His lips quirked upward, lacking mirth. "I've heard that gag about you. I don't mister nobody."

Without moving my body or changing expression, I drove my right elbow into his chin. His smirk was absorbed by a vacuous look and he slumped heavily against the shoulder of Longstreet, who flashed me a startled glance and pushed the gunman away. Anton's head slumped forward, hiding his vacant expression, and his body wedged between us, remained erect.

Neither of the cops suspected anything wrong. Traffic sounds had drowned the slap of my elbow against Anton's jaw, and the younger cop, periodically turning to look us over, apparently assumed the gunman's bowed head the result of bashfulness.

Anton was still resting when we arrived at the station. I got out one side of the car, Longstreet got out the other and Anton rolled slowly forward on his face.

Before either cop could open his mouth I said: "What's the matter with him?" threw a suspicious look at Longstreet and asked. "You do something to him in the car?"

Longstreet's outraged expression faded into one of amusement. "He was all right a minute ago."

"Looks like he fainted," said the younger cop.

The middle-aged cop glanced at Longstreet suspiciously, then said to his colleague: "Well, drag him out and slap him awake."

Without waiting to see his instructions carried out, he waved us ahead of him and followed us up the steps grunting audibly.

CHAPTER TWO

Murder by Magic

SERGEANT Danny Blake was working the desk at headquarters. When he saw me, he flashed his gold front tooth and asked hopefully: "What's the charge? Homicide?"

"Assault and battery," said our chauffeur. He pointed his thumb first at Longstreet and then at me. "On him, by him."

"The old man will be disappointed," Blake said, enjoying himself, "Only assault and battery."

I said: "Fill out your forms, clown, or it will be homicide. Only someone else will have to enter the charge."

Throwing open his log book, Blake entered my name and other identifying information, put down Longstreet as complainant, then, pen poised, looked inquiringly up at the arresting officer.

"Jefferson Lounge," the policeman said. "About a half hour ago." He glanced up at the clock on the wall. "That'd make it 2: 30 p.m. It was about 50-50, according to the manager. They both swung, only Moon connected."

Blake looked at me. "You filing counter-charges?"

Ever since we left the Jefferson, I had been thinking that over. I turned toward Longstreet and caught the same mischievous laughter deep in his eyes. I didn't understand him. I didn't understand anything, except that up till now I seemed to be reacting exactly as he wanted. I decided to change that.

"No counter-charge," I said, and the lights went out of Longstreet's eyes as though someone had thrown a switch.

He watched me thoughtfully as I posted $250.00 bond, which left my checking account at five figures: a one, a two, a six, a decimal point and two zeros.

"It'll help my civil suit if you're convicted in police court," he remarked pleasantly. "I'm going to sue you, of course."

"Do that." I took my receipt and turned to leave.

"Wait a minute," Longstreet called.

I looked back at him, waiting.

"I withdraw all charges," he said to Blake.

Sergeant Blake's face reddened and he rose to his feet. "Lissen . . ." he started to say, but that was as far as he got.

"Don't raise your voice at me!" Longstreet interrupted. And, leaning across the rail, he planted his fist squarely in the sergeant's nose.

Two things happened rapidly. Sergeant Blake sat on the floor, and the cop who brought us in twisted Longstreet's arm up behind his back until the fat man stood on his toes.

"Lock him up!" Blake roared, using his desk to pull himself erect. Blood trickled across his mouth from each nostril.

Still cramping Longstreet's arm behind his back, our cop dogtrotted him toward the corridor leading to the pokey. As they passed through the door, the fat man twisted his head over his shoulder to grin at me. The familiar mischievous laughter was back in his eyes.

"He had a devil of a time getting arrested," I said to Blake.

But the sergeant was too busy holding a handkerchief to his nose to care what I said or did. I picked my check off his desk, dropped the receipt and left.

As I went down the steps, Anton Strowlski, partially supported by the rookie cop, groggily stumbled up. The look he threw me tried to be venomous, but it came out more punchy than baneful.

I returned it with a grin.

The phone blared me out of a sound sleep at four in the morning. I let it ring while I strapped on my leg and slipped into a robe, being in no rush to end the wait of anyone who phoned at that hour.

"Moon," I said, when I finally got to the phone.

"About time," a familiar voice rapped in my ear.

It was Inspector Warren Day, Chief of Homicide, who for years had been trying to decide whether he hated my guts or loved me like a brother.

"Go to bed," I said.

"Get your clothes on. Hannegan is on his way over to pick you up."

"Yeah? What's the charge?"

"No charge. Want to see you."

I was silent for a minute. Then I said: "You've seen me lots of times. Go home and sober up."

Day's voice sank to its normal growl. "Listen, Moon. I'm in no mood for your sass. You come with Hannegan, or I'll send him back with a warrant. You're a material witness in a murder."

"Nuts. I haven't seen a murder since the last time I unravelled one you'd fouled up."

"Get your clothes on," Day repeated, and hung up.

I brushed my teeth, felt the rubble on my cheeks and wondered if a shave would bring me awake. Deciding against it, I jolted myself alive with a shot of rye instead. I was dressed when Lieutenant Hannegan arrived.

His expression was wary when he came in, a result of past experience with my resistance to Inspector Day's arbitrary orders.

"You ready?" he asked uneasily.

"All set."

He looked relieved and a little surprised. I followed him outside to the squad car, and asked no questions until he got it in motion.

Then I asked: "What's the deal?"

"Corpse named Carmichael. And the guy who did it, couldn't have."

"Come again?"

"The guy who did it was in jail when it happened. That's where you come in. Fellow named Longstreet."

"Oh," I said softly. "A faint light glimmers."

INSPECTOR Warren Day paced back and forth in his office, chewing his eternal dead cigar and periodically ducking his skinny bald head to peer at one or another of us over his glasses.

Willard Longstreet sat on a straight-backed chair in the center of the room, his fat seat protruding beyond both edges. His clothes hung in perspiration-soaked wrinkles and his round face sagged with fatigue from hours of answering questions. But a faint mocking light still glimmered in the back of his eyes.

Hannegan sat alongside Day's desk, and I relaxed in a chair tilted against the wall.

"You can't get away with it," Day snarled at Longstreet for the twenty-seventh time. "At 3:30 p.m. you had a phone argument with Carmichael. Your joint secretary recognized your voice. At 5:00 p.m. you phoned again and told Carmichael you'd be there in ten minutes. Your secretary swears it was your voice. When she left for home, Carmichael was in his office waiting for you. At 5:30 a shot was heard and the medics confirm that as the time of death. Your gun was found on the office floor too far away for it to be suicide. Your prints, and nobody else's, are on it. You got

plenty of motive. You did it. How?"

"Anyone could have stolen my gun," Longstreet said patiently, also for the twenty-seventh time. "I live in a hotel and pass keys are easy to get. Besides, I was in a locked cell from 3:00 p.m. on."

"Locked cell! Locked cell!" Day screeched. "Shut up about locked cells! You got out and back in some way." He turned on Hannegan. "Get him out of my sight! Chain him to the wall. And post a guard in sight of him, so he doesn't get out and murder the whole police department. He's got Houdini beat!"

Hannegan got to his feet and motioned the prisoner erect. Longstreet rose slowly, his shoulders drooping with tiredness.

"Would you like to earn ten thousand dollars, Moon?" he asked me casually.

"Mister Moon," I said.

"Mr. Moon, then," he said agreeably. "Would you like to earn ten thousand?"

"Depends on the method."

A mischievous twinkle pushed past the fatigue in his eyes. "Break this case. I don't think the cops can."

I looked him over thoughtfully. "If I prove you did it, where do I collect? From your estate?"

He shook his head. "I didn't do it."

I said: "I'll drop down to your cell later on."

When Hannegan and Longstreet were gone, Warren Day threw himself into his desk chair, traded his cigar butt for one just like it in his ash tray, carefully dusted it off and stuck it in his mouth.

"What do you think, Manny?" he asked dispiritedly.

"I think four in the morning is a hell of a time to wake me up when the murder was discovered ten hours earlier."

"How'd I know you'd been brought in with Longstreet? A different man was on the desk at six, and I didn't hear about you till just before I called." He ran a hand over the place his hair had been. "What you think about all this?"

I said: "You're sitting on dynamite."

"I know I am."

"Wait till the papers learn you've charged a guy with committing a murder that happened while he was locked in one of your escape-proof cells.

"He's not charged with murder. We're holding him for assaulting a cop."

"What's bond?"

"Five hundred."

"Five hundred!" I said. "Longstreet only cost me two-fifty. Cops aren't worth twice as much as people."

Day wiggled his thin nose and studied his cigar. "He hasn't inquired about bond. Seems in no hurry to get out."

"But he can, whenever he wants. Then what do you do? Charge him with murder?"

The inspector rubbed the side of his nose. "I'd get laughed out of town. Jeepers creepers, Manny, you got any ideas at all about this?"

I felt sorry for him. Normally he would cut off his head before he would ask my opinion about the weather. But he was stopped so cold by this that he hadn't even cursed me once. And it was the first time in our eight year acquaintance that we had met without trading profanity and a few mild threats.

I said: "Only what I told you. I'm as sure as I sit here that Longstreet deliberately got himself arrested. That was his sole purpose in picking a scrap at the Jefferson. And when he couldn't needle me into filing counter-charges, he slugged Blake. You have to conclude he was building an alibi. Why else would he try to get in jail?"

"No reason else," he agreed reluctantly. He looked at his watch. "Six forty-five. Nearly ten hours I questioned that guy."

"Learn anything at all?"

He shook his head. "Only that he's got a motive. The best there is. Money."

Reswapping his cigar butt for the one he had originally, he struck a match, then shook it out without lighting up and dropped the dead stick on the floor. "Ninety percent of the stock in Rex Amusement Corporation was owned by three guys. Willard Longstreet, George Carmichael and Marden Swope. Ostensibly Swope is president, but actually they were equal partners. They had some kind of a business contract leaving their stock to the surviving partners. So Longstreet inherits half Carmichael's interest in the business. On top of that Carmichael carried a fifty-thousand dollar insurance policy with Willard Longstreet as beneficiary."

"How much of a business is it?"

"Tremendous, according to Longstreet. They handle coin machines, juke boxes, cigarette vendors, pinball games and one-armed bandits."

I raised my eyebrows. "One-armed bandits, eh? Illegal, aren't they?"

"Not for private clubs. There're a hundred and fifty private clubs in town, according to Longstreet. About a hundred own their own machines, and Rex amusement Corporation supplies the others for forty percent of the take. The clubs average about twelve machines and take in about fifteen hundred a month each. I did some arithmetic and the company's share comes out to over a quarter million dollars a year. On top of that they service the machines owned by clubs for fifty dollars a month per club. Just that part brings in sixty thousand dollars a year, and two men can handle the servicing. And all this is only one phase of the business."

He stopped and stared bitterly at his dead cigar, probably thinking about an inspector's salary. "No wonder Longstreet can say ten thousand dollars like you or I would say ten cents."

I rose. "You through with me?"

"Yeah. Go on home to bed."

AT THE corridor fountain I mouthed a swig of water to clear the fuzz from my tongue before going back to Longstreet's cell. There, in the center of the hall, I found a uniformed cop seated on a chair facing the cell door.

The sun had risen, and light streaming through a small, barred window set high in the wall showed me Longstreet stretched flat on a drop-down bunk, his right wrist and right ankle cuffed to the wall as Warren Day had ordered.

"Allowed to go in there?" I asked the cop.

"Sorry," he said. "Lieutenant Hannegan's orders."

"Can I talk to him?"

The cop scratched his head. "The lieutenant didn't say anything about talking through the bars."

Longstreet turned his head in my direction. "That you, Moon?"

"Mister Moon."

"O.K. . . . Mr. Moon. Why the formality?"

"I like to keep murderers in their place."

His tufted eyebrows raised. "That doesn't include me."

"We'll still keep it 'Mister'. I'll apologize if you turn out innocent."

He pursed his lips in an expression of grudging acceptance. "Taking my proposition, Mr. Moon?"

"Maybe. What is it?"

"Simple enough. Solve Carmichael's murder within twenty-four hours and I'll pay ten thousand dollars."

"Why twenty-four hours?"

"I want it solved before I leave here."

I considered this answer from all sides without growing any wiser. My prospective client was a man hard to understand and, I suspected not anxious to be understood.

"Why don't you leave now?" I asked. "All you have to do is post bond."

Gazing up at me blandly, he handed me one of the screwiest answers I have ever gotten from a client. "Want to catch up on my sleep."

For a moment I watched him speculatively, forming new questions in my mind. But having a hunch that even a thousand well-phrased questions would get nothing more from him about why he stayed in jail, I changed tack.

I said: "Suppose I take the case and you turn out to be the murderer?"

"Would I hire you if I were?" he asked. "I could get out of here in ten minutes by posting bond. And with my alibi I could bust Warren Day right out of a job if he booked me for murder. He knows it, too."

I thought this over and saw the logic of it. "All right. I'll go along. But I can't work in the dark. I want better answers than you gave the inspector."

He glanced at the guard. "Not with a cop listening in."

I turned to the cop, who was silently taking down everything we said in shorthand.

"Oh, a spy!" I said. "Run down the hall where you can watch without hearing. I want a confidential talk with my client."

His head moved back and forth sidewise. "The lieutenant said keep my eyes on him."

"Gonna make me get a lawyer?"

"Yep."

"I'll be back in a minute," I told Longstreet.

WARREN DAY was still in his office, morosely puffing on an actually lighted cigar.

"Thought you went home," he said.

"Been talking to Longstreet. He's willing to tell me things if you move the big-eared cop from in front of his cell."

"Yeah?" His eyes narrowed. "You take his ten thousand dollar proposition?"

"Depends on what he has to say," I evaded.

"If I move the guard, will you tell me what he spills?"

I shrugged. "That's up to him. He has the right of confidence as my client, if I listen to him."

Day shook his head. "No sale. Go home and go to bed."

I took out my check book. "You said five hundred, didn't you?"

The Inspector's nose, which was the barometer of his blood pressure, whitened at the tip, indicating that he was irked. When the whole organ paled, it meant he was boiling.

"You post bond," he said, "and I'll charge him with murder!"

Spreading the check book on his desk, I reached for his desk pen. He slapped aside my hand.

"Put it up, damn you! I'll give you five minutes."

He slammed back his chair and made for the door. By the time we reached Longstreet's cell, the inspector's nose was dead white.

"You!" Day growled at the guard. "Post yourself at the end of the hall and keep your eye on this excuse for a private detective. He gets five minutes. If he passes anything through the bars, shoot him. Kill him and I'll make you a sergeant."

He wheeled and marched back to his den.

"You certainly get your way around

here," Longstreet said admiringly. "How'd you swing that?"

"Stow the blarney," I said. "We've got five minutes. Spill it fast."

With his free hand he fumbled at his shirt front and drew out a locket on a chain.

"See this?"

I nodded.

"A girl gave me this when I was seventeen. Twenty-seven years ago. It's the only thing in the world I got any sentiment about."

"Your wife?"

"I'm a bachelor." He paused to peer down at the locket as it lay on his chest. "This locket got me a local reputation. Ask my partners . . . or the one who's left, Marden Swope. Ask our secretary, Marie Kincaid. Ask anybody knows me well. They'll all tell you when I swear on this locket, it's God's own truth. I'd cut off my nose before I'd tell a lie on this locket."

"All right," I said. "Get to the point."

He put his hand over the locket. "On the memory of her who gave it to me, I swear I didn't kill Carmichael."

"I'm deeply impressed," I said. "We have three minutes left."

"Ask anything you want." He pushed the locket back in his shirt.

"Leave it out," I suggested.

His brows went up. "You'll get the truth. I don't necessarily lie when I'm not holding the locket."

I glanced at my watch. "Why was Anton Strowlski after you?"

"Anton who?"

"The rod man brought in with us," I said impatiently. "The only reason you started that brawl was because you saw Anton in the mirror and wanted cops on the scene fast."

He shook his head. "Never saw him before."

I looked through the bars at him in vexation, and he gazed back at me blandly. "Why'd you deliberately get yourself thrown in jail?" I asked finally.

He blew out his lips, there was a sound of released suction, and he used a thumb to push his plate back in place. "What makes you think I did that?"

Apparently my bothering to have the cop moved to the end of the hall had been wasted effort. I said: "If you won't answer questions, I can't help much."

He raised tufted eyebrows. "Believe me, if I could tell you a single thing about Carmichael's murder, I would. But I can't. If the answer was in me, would I pay you to dig it out?"

From the corner of my eye I saw the guard start toward us. Longstreet looked up at me without a sign of mischievousness in his suddenly serious face.

"Believe me, Mr. Moon, my being in jail has nothing to do with Carmichael's murder. You still with me?"

"Time's up," the guard broke in behind me.

I said: "I'll play along for a while," and left him to catch up on his sleep.

When I reached the front desk, Sergeant Danny Blake was just coming on duty. His nose looked like a blue turnip.

"How's the nose?" I asked.

He grunted something unintelligible.

I said: "What happened to the guy brought in with us? Anton Strowlski."

Danny thumbed through his log book. "Released on bond at 7:30. I was off then. Go off at 5:00."

CHAPTER THREE

The Golden Locket

THE NIGHT before I had gotten to bed at one in the morning and been routed out at four. I felt like falling in bed for a week, but clues have

a habit of disappearing unless you follow a murder trail while it is still hot. From the desk sergeant's directory I learned the Rex Amusement Corporation was in the Bland Building, and took a cab there.

The corporation was on the first floor. It had its own entrance, separate from that to the offices on higher floors. The entrance was centered in a long loading ramp for trucks, presumably used for loading and unloading various types of coin machines. An empty, driverless truck was backed against one end of the ramp.

I found the door unlocked and walked into a huge storage room filled with hundred of coin devices. Juke boxes, cigarette vendors, pinball games and slot machines stood in orderly rows, arranged so each type was easily accessible. At the far end of the warehouse I saw a door labeled OFFICE.

Pushing open this door, I found myself in a large, but simply furnished reception room containing only an office switchboard, a typing desk, two file cabinets and a few odd chairs. Centering one wall of the room was a glass-paned door bearing the title M. SWOPE, PRESIDENT. Two similar doors, respectively labeled G. W. CARMICHAEL, CUSTOMER SERVICE and W. H. LONGSTREET, SALES MANAGER opened in the opposite wall. The wall directly across from the reception room entrance was full of windows.

A sleek, brown-eyed blonde with nice accessories was beating the typewriter. She gave me a cool smile which meant: "State your business, please. I'm very busy."

I came right to the point by flashing the identity card which states I am a private dick and am bonded to twenty thousand dollars.

"We don't need a private detective," she said. "The police are doing fine."

I said: "Maybe you don't, but you've got one. One of your bosses hired me."

She raised carefully molded eyebrows. "Mr. Swope?"

"Longstreet." I took the chair she hadn't offered and stretched out my legs. "What's your name?"

She thought me over before she finally decided to answer. "Marie Kincaid."

"You the whole office force?"

"All that works in. We have ten service men and a crew of salesmen."

"Where are they all?"

"We don't open till eight." She raised her eyes to the wall clock and I followed suit. It was ten till.

I asked: "You been here long?"

"About five minutes."

"I mean have you worked here long?"

"Four years."

"Know about a locket Longstreet wears?"

She glanced at me quickly, then laughed a tinkly, indulgent laugh. "The swearing locket? That's what we call it behind his back. He's a nut on the subject."

"Is he serious about it, or is it just a gag?"

"Oh, he's serious. I wouldn't believe his oath on a Bible, but anything he swears to on the locket is pure truth."

I got to my feet. "I'll take a look at the room. It been cleaned up?"

"Not yet," she said.

Opening the door which bore Carmichael's name, I went in and looked around. Except for a spot of dried blood on the carpet beneath the desk, there was little to see. I wandered around looking at the floor, the desk top, the window sills and the bookcase without finding any cigarette butts of queer oriental brand, any Egyptian scarabs or

any of the other highly informative clues detectives are always running into.

Marie Kincaid came to the door and looked in at me.

"Know where they found the gun?" I asked.

She pointed to the floor near her feet. "Right there."

"How'd you know?"

She raised her nose. "I saw it. The police brought me over here from home before anything had been moved."

I estimated the distance from the desk to the gun as about twelve feet, which ruled out suicide, as Inspector Day had said.

"Let's go over the story you told the cops," I said. "I understand Longstreet phoned here twice yesterday."

"That's right."

"When did the calls come?"

"The first was at 3:30, for Mr. Carmichael. I plugged him in and they had a terrible argument."

"You listen in?"

Her nose went up again. "I did not! Mr. Carmichael's door was open."

"What was the argument about?"

"I don't know. But Mr. Carmichael swore something awful."

"Where was Swope at the time?"

"In his office." She pointed at his door across the reception room.

"Hmm. How about the second call?"

She said: "That came just at five. I had my hat on ready to leave when the phone rang. It was Mr. Longstreet again, for Mr. Carmichael. I plugged Mr. Carmichael in and, through the open door, heard him say: 'All right. Wait ten minutes and come on over. I'll be here.' "

"Then what?"

"I went home. An hour later the police came after me."

I asked: "How do you account for Longstreet being able to phone when he was locked in a cell from three o'clock on?"

Her nose went up a third time. "I don't. You're the detective. You account for it."

"How do you know it was Longstreet phoning?"

"She said it was."

"What?"

"She said it was."

"Who?"

"The switchboard operator. She said: 'Mr. Longstreet calling Mr. Carmichael.' "

I thought this over while I wandered around the room some more. Finally I said: "You told the cops you recognized his voice."

"I thought I heard it in the background," she said quickly.

I shook my head. "You told the cops Longstreet himself phoned. You didn't mention any woman."

"The woman wasn't phoning," she defended. "She was just a switchboard operator somewhere."

"Where?"

"How would I know? Wherever Mr. Longstreet phoned from."

I said: "Did you actually hear Longstreet's voice at all?"

"Well," she hesitated, "I thought I heard it in the background asking the operator to hurry up."

I asked bluntly: "Who paid you to change your story?"

Color warmed the coolness of her cheeks and her brown eyes threw flame at me. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"I read your sworn statement. You told the cops you definitely recognized Longstreet's voice, and when your questioner remarked that imitation is easy, you said: 'After four years, an imitation wouldn't fool me.' "

"It was the way the police asked

questions," she insisted. "They put words in your mouth. I *am* sure it was Mr. Longstreet phoning. I'd be sure even without the voice, because when I plugged in Mr. Carmichael, I told him Mr. Longstreet was phoning." She ended triumphantly: "If it had been anyone else, Mr. Carmichael would have bawled me out afterward!"

I SWITCHED to another subject. "What kind of guy was Carmichael?"

She examined me so appraisingly before answering, I expected some sort of startling disclosure.

But all she said was: "All right. If you like wolves."

"Married?" I asked.

"No. Bachelor."

"What'd he look like?"

Her brow puckered thoughtfully. "Tall and lanky. Slightly stooped. Gray hair. Nothing very individual, except the wolf gleam in his eye."

"How old was he?"

"Forty, forty-five. Somewhere in there."

"Have any enemies?"

She shook her head. "None I know of."

"Any arguments recently?"

"Only the one over the phone with Mr. Longstreet." Some inner thought brought her up short. "Except . . ." She shook her head in self-impatience. "That wouldn't count."

"What wouldn't?"

"Nothing. It's nothing to do with the murder."

I let my eyes harden over. "Listen, sister. If you know something, loosen up fast."

"It's nothing," she insisted. "It would only start gossip."

I said: "I don't spread gossip. Let's have it."

Reluctantly, she said: "It's Mrs. Swope. I think she and Carmichael were carrying on." She paused, then rushed on, apparently wanting to unload it fast once she had started. "The other night I forgot my purse and came back for it after closing. They were in Mr. Carmichael's office and didn't hear me come in. I heard him say: 'It's got to stop, Isobel. Suppose Marden found out?' Mrs. Swope said, 'Suppose he does? I really think he'd be glad.' Then after a while Mr. Carmichael said: 'I won't be party to breaking up a home. Especially that of my own partner. It's got to stop.' I heard Mrs. Swope begin to cry, and she said: "You're tired of me, that's all.' I left then and didn't hear any more."

I said thoughtfully: "The spurned mistress motive, eh? Worth checking." Then I had an inspiration. "That switchboard operator you mentioned. Remember her voice?"

The secretary looked doubtful. "You mean could I identify it?"

"I mean do you remember it? How it sounded? Whether you'd ever heard it before?"

Her head moved back and forth slowly. "You don't remember switchboard operator's voices. It was just a voice."

"Could it have been Mrs. Swope?"

Her eyes went wide. "Mrs. Swope! Why ever would she pretend to be a switchboard operator?"

"Maybe she had a code arrangement with Carmichael," I said. "With her husband in the same office, she'd hardly phone and give her own name."

She looked doubtful. "But suppose Mr. Longstreet had been here when she called? She'd have felt kind of silly."

"Who knew Longstreet was gone?" I asked.

She looked less doubtful. "Everyone. He'd been talking about going up to his

summer camp for weeks. Mrs. Swope would have known that he left at noon yesterday." She looked down at the tiny watch on her wrist. "Eight o'clock. Time I got back to work."

She turned and went back to her desk. I moved back into the reception room just as the outer door opened and Marty O'Brien came in. Marty had been a muscle man back in the days of the now defunct extortion ring, but I hadn't seen him around in recent years. Probably he had been in jail.

He said: "Hi, Marie. Boss in yet?" And then he saw me.

He didn't say anything. Just looked.

"Hello, Marty," I said.

He nodded.

Marie said: "You're the first one here," and went on with her typing.

Marty threw me another deadpan look and drifted out again.

"That one of your salesmen?" I asked Marie.

She said: "Our best."

The door opened again and a smooth-cheeked, middle-aged man entered. In a sleek, pointed-nose and thin-lipped sort of way he was handsome. He wore expensive clothes and rimless eyeglasses with an air of needing both.

His face was all set in a big smile for Marie, but it faded when he saw she had company.

"Good morning, Mr. Swope," Marie said in a prim, secretarial voice.

Swope doled her out an adulterated version of the original smile and gave me an inquiring glance.

"Manville Moon," I said, showing him my license card. "Retained by Longstreet."

His brows knit. "I see."

He failed to offer his hand, but stood chewing his lip while he thought me over. Finally he seemed to come to a decision.

"Come in," he said, and preceded me to his office.

When we were seated and he had offered me a cigar, which I politely refused after noting the brand, he leaned back and crossed hands over his stomach.

"I've told the police everything I know about this terrible affair," he said. "But of course I'll be glad to give any further help I can."

"Fine. Will you just run over what you told the police?"

He raised his shoulders and let them fall again. "It wasn't much, I'm afraid. I knew nothing about the two phone calls until Marie told of them when the police were here. I left at four-thirty yesterday, and didn't know anything had happened until a policeman came to my home about six."

"Know what Carmichael and Longstreet could have been arguing about over the phone? That is, if it was Longstreet."

He shook his head. "They always got along. We all did. Why, we grew up together, the three of us. We were playmates in grammar school." A reminiscent smile spread across his face. "We even chased the same girl. In high school Mrs. Swope went with all three of us before she finally settled on me."

"Could your wife have been the cause of the argument?"

He frowned. "Of course not! They sometimes joked about both remaining bachelors because of Mrs. Swope, but purely in fun. She hadn't gone with either of them for five years before our marriage. And we've been married twenty-two years."

I said: "Do you think it actually was Longstreet who phoned yesterday?"

He looked uncomfortable. "Marie is sure of it. And I can think of no reason she would lie."

"How do you account for his being able to phone at three-thirty and again at five, when he was locked in a cell from three on?"

He shrugged. "I make no attempt to account for it. The police are paid to unravel such questions." His fingers drummed on the desk top. "I don't understand how he got in jail in the first place. When he left at noon yesterday, he was intending to drive up for a week at his camp on the river. He'd planned it for weeks, and I know he intended to start at one o'clock. By two-thirty he should have been there, so what was he doing in a bar in town?"

SUDDENLY an expression of amazed inspiration crossed his face. "I just thought of a possible explanation!"

"Yeah?"

"I haven't been down to the jail yet. How do we know the man in jail is Longstreet?"

That jolted me. Thinking back, I couldn't remember anyone identifying Longstreet, and no one who knew him had looked over the prisoner.

I said: "About two-forty pounds, grizzled hair, false teeth, hairy eyebrows that curve upward like horns, and an expression like a kid getting ready to heave a snowball at a high hat."

The enthusiasm faded from Swope's face. "That's Willard to a T."

"It's still a straw," I said. "How about dropping down and looking him over?"

He glanced at his watch. "Can't this morning. Be glad to this afternoon. Is that all you want of me?" He glanced at his watch again.

"Not quite. Assuming Longstreet did commit the murder, what motive could he have?"

His lips curled in a faint smile. "We have a business contract leaving our stock to the surviving partners. Half of Carmichael's interest in this business is motive enough. And in addition, Longstreet is primary beneficiary to a fifty thousand dollar insurance policy on Carmichael."

"How'd Carmichael happen to carry a policy like that?" I asked.

"We all did. If I died, the money went to Carmichael, with Longstreet as secondary beneficiary. Longstreet's policy named me, with Carmichael as secondary beneficiary. I was secondary on Carmichael's policy. It's not an unusual business arrangement. Quite common in partnerships."

I said: "How did the murderer get in and out of here without being seen? Don't you have a watchman?"

"No. We have adequate locks, a burglar alarm system and are protected by Burns."

"About Carmichael," I said. "What kind of guy was he?"

He frowned down at his hand, which beat a swift march on the desk top. "George was a good business man and an excellent partner." The sentence ended on a slightly raised note, as though an unspoken phrase beginning with "but" should have been attached to it.

I said: "But what?"

He glanced at me, startled. "What are you? A mind reader?"

"Just a guesser. What was wrong?"

His expression was reluctant, as one unwilling to speak ill of the dead. "I suppose it was more virtue than fault. He was too strait-laced."

After Marie Kincaid's evaluation of Carmichael as a wolf, the answer amused me. Fleetingly a quotation passed through my mind. Something like: "Women and men see friends through different eyes."

I said: "About women?"

"No. He was human enough, I suppose. Perhaps strait-laced isn't the right word. Unforgiving would be better. He gave absolute loyalty to his friends and demanded the same of them."

"Hardly sounds like a fault."

"Perhaps not," he admitted. "Except he carried it too far. As an example, we used to retain a lawyer named Howard Tattersall. He's an excellent lawyer and has saved the firm considerable money in law suits. He also happens to be a minor stockholder in the company, owns about five per cent of the common stock. About a month ago we were preparing to offer a few new shares for sale on the open market to help finance opening a branch in another city. Tattersall, of course, had advance information and a few hours before our release, he dumped his entire holdings on the market. The sudden dumping of such a large block caused a temporary drop in price, and before it could recover, Tattersall rebought his own stock plus part of the new issue without it costing him a cent. His total gain was about twenty thousand dollars, and George was furious. He insisted that Tattersall be kicked off the payroll immediately."

I said: "I think I'd agree with him about that."

Swope shook his head impatiently. "You misunderstand. What I gave was merely the bare outline of the transaction, and actually there were several ramifications. One was that a speculating broker took a flyer and bore the brunt of the loss. It didn't cost our firm a cent. But George remained adamant, so we switched lawyers, thereby losing the best corporate legal advice in town." He studied his tapping fingers glumly, still vexed by his late partner's stubbornness.

"Was Tattersall sore?" I asked.

He looked up again. "Naturally. We're a fat account."

I kept my tone casual. "Sore enough to do anything about it?"

"Do anything?" He frowned. "You mean like shoot Carmichael?"

"Yeah?"

For a minute he brooded over the question, not liking it too much. "I haven't the slightest idea," he said finally. "My only relations with Tattersall were business ones and I don't know what kind of person he is otherwise."

CHAPTER FOUR

Gang-Up

THEN the door began to open slowly, as though the person on the other side were hesitant to disturb us. Swope watched it expectantly, then his expression soured to a frown as the door finally swung fully open. Our interruptor was a short woman, this side of forty-five and beginning to spread. Probably she had once been beautiful, but corsets and cosmetics no longer could hide middle age. She wore expensive clothes that looked altogether much too young for her.

Swope said: "Didn't Miss Kincaid say I was busy, Isobel?"

I guessed that this was Mrs. Swope, and didn't miss that while Swope familiarly referred to the secretary as "Marie" in conversation, she was "Miss Kincaid" to his wife.

Isobel said: "I'm sorry. I have to see you. Will you be long?" Her tone was a curious mixture of embarrassed apology and determination.

Swope looked at his watch. "We're nearly finished. You may as well stay, now you're here." He performed belated

introductions. "This is Mr. Moon, Isobel. Mr. Moon, my wife."

I asked her how she did and offered the chair I had left when she entered.

She said: "No. Keep it," and took another in the corner.

I said: "I was just leaving, Mrs. Swope." Then to her husband: "One more question and I won't bother you any more. Are you familiar with a locket Longstreet has?"

The color drained from Mrs. Swope's face, leaving it stark white behind its oversupply of rouge.

Swope said: "I've seen it. Why?"

"Know the story connected with it?"

He knit his brows thoughtfully. "Some silly sentimental thing, as I remember. Left to him by his mother or someone. He takes oaths on it. I always thought he was a little hipped on the subject. What about it?"

"Nothing. Just curious."

I was watching Mrs. Swope. Her color began to come back, but she was still obviously shaken. With a sudden flash of inspiration I combined Longstreet's mention of the locket as a gift from a girl when he was seventeen, with Swope's casual reference to his wife's high school romances, coming out with the interesting answer that Mrs. Swope could be the locket's donor.

I said: "I've got to go. Glad to have met you, Mrs. Swope."

She dipped her head in my direction without meeting my eyes.

Three men had come into the reception room while I was closeted with Swope. Two I recognized as compatriots of Marty O'Brien in bygone extortion ring days, but could not recall their names. The third was Tiny Sartt, a flat-headed, bow-legged killer with a criminal record longer than MacArthur's war record.

I said: "Hello, Tiny. You a star salesman here, too?"

His constantly darting eyes touched my face and moved away. "Hello, Moon."

"Hello, what?"

"Mister Moon," he corrected. His eyes darted back at me and down again.

I said to Marie: "What's the name of the outfit over you?"

"Riverside Seed Company."

"How do you get there?"

"You have to go outside and use the main building entrance."

A visit to the Riverside Seed Company got me nothing that I hadn't already learned from Warren Day. The Rex Amusement Corporation closed at five, but the seed company stayed open an hour later. At about five-thirty the whole office force had been startled by what my informant described as a "terrific blam," and one of the clerks said: "That's a shot!"

Nearly everyone in the office, about twelve people, had gone to investigate. They found the entrance to the place downstairs unlocked, entered in a group and found the body. No one had seen the murderer leave.

The Drake Hotel is as expensive as the Jefferson, but in a quieter, more snobbish way. While not exclusively an apartment hotel, it caters to permanent residents and makes no effort to attract the tourist trade through decorative cocktail lounges and elaborate dance floors. The only entertainment facility offered its guests is a small, clean dining room which closes at eight nightly.

At the desk I asked for Howard Tattersall's room number.

"Suite four-seventeen," the room clerk said. "I'll ring to see if he's in."

I said: "Never mind. He's expecting me."

The elevator surged upward like the smooth stroke of a piston and eased to a cushioned halt. Silent doors parted in the middle, disappearing into the walls, and when I stepped out into the deeply carpeted hall, they slid soundlessly together again.

The silence was almost reverent. As I started down the hall the leather straps of my false leg squeaked and I felt guiltily self-conscious—as though violating the sanctity of a cathedral.

The man who answered my knock at the door of suite four-seventeen was of medium height and beginning to put on weight. Dark hair, parted in the middle, was brushed straight back from a wide, short forehead. Heavy black brows surmounted a strong nose and hard, but wide lips clamped around a short briar. He wore a lounging robe.

"Mr. Tattersall?" I asked.

He nodded.

"I'm Manville Moon. Your office told me I'd find you home today."

Removing his pipe from his mouth with his right hand, which conveniently prevented him from offering a handshake, he said: "If it's business, I'm sorry, but this is my day off."

"It's business about a murder," I said. "May I come in?"

"Are you police?" he asked sharply.

"Private." I watched his face for a minute, saw no invitation there, and said: "I'm coming in."

He stepped back, swung the door wide and let me go past him into the room. It was a large room, much better furnished than my walkup parlor. Doors on either side of it leading to other rooms made it at least a three unit apartment. I wondered how many hundred more a month he paid than I did for my three room flat.

I tried an easy chair, liked it and settled back with a cigar in my mouth. The lawyer remained standing, frowning down at me while I applied flame to the cigar end.

"You've heard of George Carmichael's death," I said finally, making it a statement instead of a question.

"On the radio," he said shortly. "I don't get a morning paper."

"Used to work for him, didn't you?"

He looked displeased and faintly insulted. "I was retained by his firm as legal counsel. They weren't my only account."

"Why'd they drop you?"

"I don't see that it's any of your business," he said testily. "Mind telling me what you want?"

"Not at all. Know Willard Longstreet?"

"Of course. One of the company directors. Sales manager, I believe he calls himself. He also happens to be a neighbor of mine. Lives down the hall."

"Yes, I know. Longstreet retained me to solve the crime. You wouldn't have heard it on the radio, but he's the prime suspect. Matter of fact, he's in jail."

His eyes showed mild surprise, but no particular concern. "So?"

"His gun was found at the murder scene. Longstreet claims it was kidnapped from his room."

"So?"

"So you and Carmichael had a falling out. So you live within crawling distance of Longstreet's door. So where were you yesterday about five-thirty in the afternoon?"

His eyes narrowed. "Pardon me a moment."

Abruptly he did an about face and passed through one of the doors into another room. I heard the click of a phone being raised, got out of my chair quietly and circled toward the door. As I reached

it and got my ear near the jamb, I heard him say, "Right away," and drop the phone back in its cradle.

CIRCLING back to my chair, I settled in it again and was drawing slowly on my cigar when he reentered the room. I looked up and got a surprise.

A sardonic smile lifting the edges of his wide mouth, he leaned in the doorway and accurately pointed an Army automatic at my cigar.

I removed the cigar, but the muzzle failed to follow it, which led me to believe my head was the actual target. I waited for him to speak, but he seemed perfectly content to continue leaning and pointing.

"What am I supposed to do?" I asked finally. "Raise my arms, bark like a dog, or just go home?"

"Just sit," he said. "And keep your mouth shut."

So for twenty minutes I sat and kept my mouth shut. When my cigar became a stub, I set it carefully on the ash stand next to my chair, moving my hand slowly because I could see the automatic's hammer was back and the safety off. At the end of twenty minutes a key turned in the outer door's lock.

Anton Strowlski came through the door, nodded to Tattersall and turned his brittle eyes on me.

"*Mister* Moon, isn't it?" he asked with heavy sarcasm, deeply underlining the "Mister."

I didn't feel called on to reply.

"Stand up," he said.

I rose slowly, turned my back and raised my arms without waiting for the order. Anton's hand snaked under my armpit from behind, removed my P-38, then carefully patted my pockets.

"Turn around," he commanded.

Facing my host again, I dropped my arms. Anton drew a short, dainty automatic from his side pocket, a twin of the one he had lost to the police, removed his smart snap-brim hat and dropped it over the gun.

"Only a .32," he said pleasantly. "But I use dum-dums. It makes a hole like a saucer." The mock-pleasantness left his voice and his lips drew thin. "We're going out now, and if you make a move I don't like, you get it."

He waved me toward the door, then followed, keeping a pace distance between us. Tattersall stayed home, presumably not caring to participate in murder on his day off, but just before the door shut behind us he said: "It's been very pleasant, Mr. Moon. Do come again."

I said: "If I can't make it, drop in on me. I'll be in the river." It wasn't good, but it was the best I could do with that hat-covered little gun aimed at my back.

Our trip down was uneventful. Just two well-dressed men, one of the modern school who wears his hat in elevators, the other with his politely draped over his fist. It stayed there even after we left the elevator, clear across the lobby, down the steps and into the waiting Buick coach at the curb.

Anton and I shared the roomy back seat. Our bullet-headed chauffeur was a stranger. Getting in I caught a quick glimpse of his knuckle-bent profile and knew I had never seen him before. As we pulled away, I started to memorize the back of his head, on the remote chance that I'd ever get an opportunity to look for it.

It was an interesting head. The neck was a weal of creased muscle that bulged out beyond the flattened rear of his skull, and the ears were mere blobs of broken gristle bunched into shapelessness.

Without instruction he wheeled the car through traffic toward the south edge of town. He kept the speed moderate until we reached the river road, then opened up and we rolled along at highway speed.

Anton spoke only once during the trip, when we reached a long, straight stretch and bullet-head pressed his foot to the floor.

"Cut the horses," Anton said curtly.

Our speed immediately dropped to a sedate fifty-five.

A few miles later we slowed and turned on to a dirt road. We passed a farm house, went on about two miles without seeing another and the road began to grow rougher. Now entirely away from public view, Anton uncovered his gun and put his hat back on his head. I glanced down at the gun and got my second shocking surprise of the day. Only this one was pleasant.

They say that every criminal eventually makes some stupid mistake which ends his career. Anton Strowlski had just made his and it exceeded the criminal's prerogative of stupidity. His neat and deadly little automatic had the safety tightly on.

Selfishly I kept the secret to myself. My right hand slashed sidewise and the hard edge of my palm caught him directly between the eyes. I had learned that blow with the Rangers, and twice used it on German sentries. It worked just as effectively on Polish-American gunmen. I felt the bone crunch and he was dead before his automatic dropped to the seat between us.

Quietly easing him back in the far corner, I picked up the gun, flipped off the safety catch and settled back to enjoy the rest of the ride.

The road grew rougher and rougher, finally becoming nothing but two weed-choked ruts. Bullet-head halted the car alongside a dense growth of bushes.

"This O.K.?" he asked, peering out at the tangled cluster of undergrowth.

"Just fine," I said.

Startled, he spun in his seat and gaped at me and my lifeless seat-mate. Then his hand dove toward a shoulder holster. I let him bring his gun as far as the top of the front seat.

Anton had told the truth. It made a hole like a saucer.

THE doorman at the Drake Hotel gave me a more courteous greeting than I deserved after parking a Buick containing two dead men at his curb. The elevator operator remembered my previous visit too, and shot to the fourth floor without waiting for instructions.

I had recovered my P-38 from one of Anton's pockets and found his key to four-seventeen in another. Approaching Tattersall's door with the former in my right hand and the latter in my left, I unlocked the door, kicked it open and charged in.

My dramatics were unnecessary. Howard Tattersall sat in the same chair I had occupied while enjoying my cigar. But he wasn't smoking, because a bullet had left too little of his mouth to hold a cigar.

He slumped sidewise with one arm hanging over the edge of the chair so that fingertips just touched the floor. The other hand lay in his lap, gripping the Army automatic.

Kneeling next to the body, I sniffed the gun muzzle. It had been fired.

Rising, I entered the room from which Tattersall had phoned and found the telephone standing on a desk by the window. I dialed homicide and asked for Inspector Day.

"Moon," I said, when he finally came to the phone. "I'm at suite four-seventeen in the Drake Hotel. Dead lawyer here named Tattersall."

Day asked: "Murder?"

"Can't say. Either suicide or framed to look like it. Unless you want an unscientific opinion."

"Give it," the inspector said.

"Murder, then. No evidence. Just a hunch."

Day was silent for a minute, then he said: "I'll send Hannegan. Got to take a nap before I drop dead."

As though bringing up an afterthought, I said casually: "There are also two bodies in a Buick parked in front of the hotel. License 207-309."

"What!" Day yelped. "What you got there? A massacre?"

"Just a rough party." I gave him a quick sketch of what had happened.

When I finished the resume he asked: "Think Tattersall bumped Carmichael?"

"Possibly."

"Wish you hadn't eliminated all the witnesses," he complained. "Complicates things."

"If they were still alive, I wouldn't be."

"That's not a bad idea either," he growled, and hung up.

Glancing at my watch, I was surprised to discover it was only a quarter of eleven.

Beginning to feel the effect of only three hours sleep, I found a sidestreet barroom and took on a rye and water. I was the only customer at that time of day, and as I dawdled over my second drink, the bartender dropped a coin in the record machine to play a Phil Harris number. When it played out, I picked a nickle from my change on the bar and started over to play another. Then I noticed a pinball game against the wall. Right next to it stood a cigarette vendor.

I changed my mind and went back to my stool. Three coin machines in this small, neighborhood bar had started a train of thought. I began visualizing various stores I had been in recently, trying to remember whether or not they were equipped with coin machines. The drugstore near my flat had one pinball game. The confectionery next to it had one. I thought of two filling stations and a barber shop where I had noticed them, and suddenly the tremendous size of the business registered on me. I could not think of a single tavern, restaurant, drugstore, grocery, filling station or barber shop I had been in during recent months which was not equipped with one or more coin devices. I motioned to the barkeep.

"You own this place?" I asked.

"Yeah," he admitted.

"Where you rent your coin machines?"

He rubbed his chin. "Why?"

"Because I want to know."

"You a cop?"

"No."

"What are you?"

I said: "I'm the guy just asked you a question. Get up an answer before I kick your teeth in."

He widened his eyes at me, sucked in his breath and said: "Fellow named Sartt."

"Tiny?"

"That's the guy."

I said: "Next time he's in, tell him to take 'em out. My company's taking over this territory."

The bartender paled. "Listen, mister. I can't tell Sartt that. I'd end up in the gutter."

"You'll end up in the gutter if you don't."

He ran a hand over his forehead. "Geez, mister. I'm just trying to make a living. I don't want any damn ma-

chines in here at all. But I want trouble less than I don't want machines. If you guys start squeezing me between you, I lose no matter which way I jump. Why don't you talk to Sartt, and I'll take whichever machines the both of you say."

I grinned at him. "Relax and have a drink. I was just fishing for information. Now I've got it."

Some of his color came back, but now he looked worried. "You are a cop, ain't you?"

I shook my head. "Just a guy who doesn't like Tiny Sartt. Forget it. You won't get in trouble."

I had the final segment of the puzzle.

CHAPTER FIVE

Close-In

I WENT home and shaved, ate a quick breakfast and took a cab to police headquarters. I found Warren Day asleep on the cot in his office. I shook him awake.

"Go away," he said.

"Get up. I've got your case solved for you."

He sat up and rubbed his eyes, groped over to the desk and found his glasses. "What time is it?"

"About noon."

Sinking into his chair, he took a pint bottle from a bottom drawer, swished a slug around in his mouth, swallowed and started to put it back.

I said: "Do I drink alone when you come to my house?"

Grumpily he reopened the drawer, examined the bottle's liquor level over the top of his glasses and handed it to me. He watched suspiciously as I raised it to my lips and said: "O.K. That's enough," before I even downed the first swallow. I handed it back after the second.

"If you're going to get me up at four in the morning to break your cases," I said, "you've got to keep me awake."

He fumbled a dead cigar from his ash tray, dusted it off and popped it in his mouth. "O.K. Spill your story."

"Not yet. I've got it figured out, but we have to prove it. I've no urge to be sued."

"Oh," he said. "You got a theory."

"Sure. What have you got?"

"Nothing," he admitted. "I'm listening."

"This is what I want. You have Marden Swope, Mrs. Swope and Marie Kincaid picked up separately and brought here. Keep them apart and I'll talk to them one at a time."

He eyed me fixedly over his glasses. "What do I pick them up on?"

I waved that aside impatiently. "That's your problem. If you're leary of warrants, lure them down. Tell 'em the jail's on fire and you need a bucket brigade. Tell them anything." Then I remembered something. "Swope was coming in anyway, to identify Longstreet. He suggested your prisoner might be someone else."

Day snapped erect. "He what!"

"Don't get excited. Just a screwy idea he had. It's Longstreet, all right."

He leaned back in his chair agan. "And when all these people get here?"

"I'll talk to them."

He scratched his head. "Knowing how you like to grandstand, I don't suppose you'd outline your case first?"

"Don't suppose I would."

"O.K.," he said wearily. "What can I lose? I haven't got a case anyway."

He picked up his phone, gave the necessary orders and we sat back to wait.

Inspector Day sent out for sandwiches

and coffee after pointedly informing me that my share of the bill would be thirty-five cents, and collecting it before he ordered. We had just finished our uninspiring lunch when Hannegan stuck his head in the door.

"They're all here," he said.

"Separate?" I asked.

"None of them even know the others are here."

"Send in Mrs. Swope," I ordered.

Hannegan looked at Day, his eyebrows raised.

"I'm just a figurehead around here," the inspector said bitterly. "Don't pay any attention to me."

The lieutenant shrugged, started to smile and wiped it off fast when Day roared: "Get a move on!"

"Yes sir," he said, and backed out hurriedly.

"See what happens when I let you give orders?" Day asked aggrievedly. "Discipline shot to hell!" He rubbed his bald spot and mumbled: "Impertinent pup."

"He didn't say a word," I said in Hannegan's defense.

The inspector snapped, "I know what he was thinking!"

A knock sounded. Day growled, "Come in," and Hannegan opened the door nervously.

He stepped aside to let in Mrs. Swope, then asked the space between Day and me if we wanted him to remain. It was impossible to determine which of us he was addressing.

I nodded imperceptibly and Day said: "You can stay if you keep your mouth shut."

Mrs. Swope waited uncertainly, kneading her hands together and looking frightened. I introduced her to the inspector and asked her to have a chair. She looked around hesitantly, finally deciding on the one farthest from Warren Day's desk. I walked over and looked down at her.

"Ever hear of truth serum, Mrs. Swope?" I asked.

She looked puzzled, then nodded doubtfully.

"We gave it to Longstreet, and his locket couldn't help. He told us all about it."

I might have told her that the world would end in five minutes. She turned paper white and clutched at her throat. "No," she whispered. "No."

"Don't hold it against him, Mrs. Swope. He meant to keep his oath, but you can't fight truth serum. He had to tell." I made my voice sympathetic.

She asked in a dead voice: "Everything?"

I played the hunch on which my whole case was based, holding my breath as I played it, because if I were wrong, Mrs. Swope would know my whole attack was bluff.

I SAID: "Even that you were the girl who gave him the locket twenty-seven years ago."

It worked. The shock of it, superimposed on the shock of Longstreet breaking his oath, nearly heaped her on the floor in a faint. She managed to retain consciousness, but all resistance was knocked out of her. The hopeless eyes she turned up at me were utterly convinced I knew everything.

"What do you want of me?" she asked.

"We just want you to clear up a point or two. How you learned of the plot, for example."

She was too far gone for suspicion, but she said in dull surprise: "Didn't Willard tell that?"

"We didn't ask him," I said easily. "It's not an important point. We know you warned him, after making him swear on

the locket he'd never tell. We know why you warned him . . . That you couldn't bear to see an old sweetheart framed, even though your husband was the framer . . ."

"Framed?" she asked wonderingly. "I didn't know it was a frame-up when I told Willard."

"I was merely using a figure of speech," I rapidly backtracked. "You see, we know enough of the story so that we have already arrested your husband. He's beyond all possible help, so you have nothing to lose by telling us how you learned the plot."

Her head drooped and she gazed helplessly down at her hands. "I overheard them in Marden's office."

"Overheard who?"

"Marden and Miss Kincaid. It was a week ago. I dropped in to see Marden, and Miss Kincaid was in his office. The door was open a crack and I stopped to listen. I don't know why, because I'm not a suspicious woman. After listening, I thought it best Marden not suspect I had heard, so I left without going in."

"What did you hear?"

"I heard Miss Kincaid say: 'Suppose at the last minute Longstreet changes his mind about going to the camp?' Marden said: 'I thought of that. Anton will tail him when he leaves the office at noon. If he looks like changing his mind, Anton has orders to stick a gun in his ribs and make sure he's at camp by four at the latest.'"

I suddenly understood a lot of things which had not previously been clear. "How'd you know what they were talking about?" I asked.

"I didn't," Mrs. Swope said dully. "If I'd had any idea . . ." Her voice faded away for a minute, then went on: "I'd have spoken to Marden. I'd . . ." She looked up at me helplessly. "I don't know what I'd have done. I didn't know what it all meant, and I kept brooding about it until I was nearly sick, and it got closer and closer to the time, and finally the actual morning arrived without my doing anything about it, and I couldn't stand it any more so I went to the office and told Willard just before he left at noon."

She began to cry, making no sound, but with her shoulders jiggling up and down in jerky rhythm as tears slid across her face.

I said to Hannegan: "Got all that?"

He looked up from the notebook in which he had been unobtrusively writing during the entire interview. "Yeah. Got it all."

"Have someone type it up in the form of a statement for Mrs. Swope to sign. And while it's being typed, bring in Marden Swope. Get Longstreet from his cell too."

He said: "Check," rose from his chair and escorted Mrs. Swope from the room.

As the door closed behind them, Warren Day burst out: "What in hell's going on? All that nonsense about truth serum!"

I grinned at him. "Worked, didn't it?"

"Is Marden Swope the killer?" he demanded.

"I doubt it," I said, enjoying myself. "Can't tell yet."

He peered at me sourly over his glasses. "Damn grandstander," he muttered.

A knock sounded and Day said: "Come in."

It was Marden Swope, followed by Hannegan.

I said to Swope: "You've met Inspector Day, haven't you?"

"Yes. Yesterday."

Day grunted something unintelligible, then said begrudgingly: "Have a chair."

Another knock sounded and Day said: "Come in."

It was Willard Longstreet, flanked by two bluecoats. He looked the group over without speaking, then moved over and took a chair next to me. Apparently he had gotten some sleep, for he looked rested. But his clothes were in terrible shape and he needed a shave.

In a self-conscious voice Marden Swope said: "Hello, Willard."

Longstreet nodded at his partner gravely, no sign of humor in his eyes.

"Swope suggested you might be an impostor," I told Longstreet. "We brought him down to identify you."

A mischievous twinkle replaced the serious expression in Longstreet's eyes. "What made you think that, Marden?"

Marden Swope said embarrassedly: "It's Willard, all right, Mr. Moon."

"What made you think I wasn't?" Longstreet asked.

Swope remained silent, so I said: "He couldn't understand how you got in jail. Weren't you supposed to be up at your camp yesterday?"

"Planned to be. Changed my mind."

"Why?"

Longstreet eyed me quizzically. "No law against it, is there?"

"None I know of. Especially since you had a good idea of what awaited you at the camp."

Swope asked: "You through with me now?"

"Not quite," I said. I turned back to Longstreet. "I have the case solved."

There was a sharp click as Longstreet's upper plate dropped and was snapped back in place by his tongue. Swope licked his lips and watched me curiously.

"Funny thing about this case," I said to Warren Day. "Longstreet hired me to find out something he already knew. That probably sounds silly, and it was in a way. But Longstreet couldn't figure any other way to handle the impossible situation he found himself in."

I paused to let tension build up in the room. The only reason I occasionally grandstand is because Day hates me for it. He was glaring at me now.

"Another peculiar thing about the case," I went on, "was that all of the evidence was false. So to solve the case, you had to ignore the evidence and depend on pure reason. That's why the police fell down."

Glancing sidewise at Day, I noted his nose now shown pure white against the inflamed background of his face.

I SAID: "The first premise I worked on was that Longstreet here couldn't possibly have committed the murder. The police should have decided that at once also, but they preferred to play around with weird theories about his pulling an Houdini jail break and then breaking back in again. My

(Continued on page 128)

DEATH IS NO BARGAIN

Thyatira sang at the Singapore Club.

THAT day I was sitting alone in my office looking at myself in the mirror I had propped up on my desk. I was examining the startling thing that was me in a brand new pair of black plastic-framed glasses. I looked like a guy with two 650 x 16 tires hung on his eyebrows.

The one and only door in my professional dust trap opened and I quit looking at the mirror and looked up at that instead. A man was floating in. The guy was small. He had feet that were born for dancing slippers. His teeth should have been yanked when he was a kid, and he was grinning, showing me the collection of tobacco stains he'd picked up over the long years. He was one of

Private Eye Eddie Gates wasn't used to his new cheaters. He could see the torch-singer's twenty grand worth of rubies all right, but he failed to note she was marked for death.

By

GEORGE F. KULL

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A shadow darker than the other shadows in the room was coming towards me.

the rough boys Rex Scott employs over in his Singapore on Sierra Street. Joe Siracuse. I knew him slightly.

"Well, well," he said to me. He slippered on across the office, sat down and pulled out a cigarette from a mashed pack. He straightened it out, lit it and blew smoke in my face. His fingers looked like a Chinaman's, they were that yellow.

"Well, well," he said again, staring at my glasses. "New peepers for the peeper." He ha-ha'ed and blew more smoke.

I didn't particularly shake. This little guy had lost a couple of rounds. The brochure on him up at Carson State told all about it.

"You're laughing much better these days," I told him.

"The boss is got a job for you, peeper," he said. He reached deftly in his inner breast pocket, pulled out a long, very white envelope and threw it before me on the desk. "Something's hot and burning his mitts and he can't let go," he added. "A torcher. A dame with a frame. Some babe!" He spit out of the corner of his mouth. I wondered where he thought he was aiming. There wasn't a cuspidor in the place.

The envelope had my name on it in a nice bold masculine hand. And in the upper corner of the envelope were these gold-embossed words: "Rex Scott, Singapore Club, Reno."

Inside the envelope were five fresh, crisp C notes.

I picked up the phone, dialed the Singapore Club, got Rex Scott. "This is Edward Gates," I told him. "Maybe you know who I am. There's a dancing boy here in my office and he says you want to see me."

His voice came over the phone about as excited as honey dripping from a spoon. This guy, I imagined, devoted as much time to worry as Roosevelt did over his chances for a third term.

"Yes, Gates," he said slowly. "I sent him. Can you come over? There's a little job I'd like you to do."

"What kind of a job?"

"Well . . ." He was hesitating. Then: "In your racket you'd probably call it being a bodyguard." He said it like it was slightly offensive.

"Don't spoil your supper," I said. "I'll be over to give it a looksee." I cradled out on him, stuck the money in my wallet, and went over to the coat rack in the corner. I put on my harness, put my coat over that, jammed my hat over my ears. That knocked my new black glasses cockeyed. I took off the hat, adjusted the glasses, put the hat on again more carefully.

The little guy was watching me. "Ain't used to 'em yet, huh, peeper?"

I poked a hard forefinger into the middle of his back and watched him jump.

"Cripes!" he yelled. "Don't never do that, pal. I ain't got over the last time a real one was ridin' back there. Gives me the creeps."

"You got a car?"

"Yeah. Scott's. He sent me down in it to pick you up. Hurry call, peeper. Chop chop." He clapped his hands noisily together and let out a puff of cigarette smoke that blew past my right ear.

"You're going to get buried with all your wisecracks laid alongside of you some day," I told him.

"That ain't funny neither," he replied. He punched the elevator bell. We both waited for the cage, looking at each other like Micawber and Heep.

THE Singapore was tony. From the big purple anodyzed aluminum front of the building down to the club's thinnest lucite toothpick, it was

tony. It was the granddaddy of clubs. It was the club to end all clubs. It was a lollapazoo.

Scott's big Caddy whispered to a stop in front of the place. The chauffeur let the motor keep on nibbling. That meant he was going to take it away as soon as we got out.

I looked out the window at a solemn doorman who looked like a grand duke at a coronation. He should now hop over and open the door for us.

He didn't. He'd probably recognized tobacco-teeth riding in the back seat with me. I leaned against the latch and got out.

"This way, peeper," said the little man. He slip-hipped himself around the side of the shiny building to a narrow door that had a blank brown face with the words, "Singapore, employees only" done in neat yellow script on it.

The little guy keyed himself in and held the door for me. It was quiet in here. We were in a hall that was carpeted no thicker than up to my shoetops. The walls were two-toned blue. Built-in fluorescents in the ceiling kept shadows away.

"This way, peeper." He led me through another door at the end of this hall and through the club's kitchen. It was a blaze of pots and pans and stoves and white uniforms and nice smells of things cooking. I began to remember that it was time for me to eat and that I probably wouldn't. We skirted the dining room.

Another door. This time the little guy paused. He knuckled the panel, nodded to me and began to walk away. "You can go in, peeper," he said over his shoulder. "Watch out them cheaters don't fall off your nose."

I went on in. This would be the office. A couple of typewriters, filing cabinets, one desk. This was where they counted the money at night and rubbed their hands briskly. A thin figure who wore glasses like mine was seated behind the desk, doing figures in a book.

"Mr. Scott?" I asked him. "I'm Gates."

He looked me over, thinking about what I'd said. He had the cagey look in his eyes of a man figuring just how much a guy like me could be taken for. He looked like a born gambler without funds, a gentleman who wouldn't slap a lady's face—before he tried kissing her first. I thought his mouth leered a little.

"No," he said. "I'm Tony Hendry. Bookkeeper. Rex's office is right through that door over there." He pointed with the end of a ball pen.

I smiled back and tried hard to keep from tripping on the mattress they were using for a carpet. I opened the door, went on through and closed it quietly behind me.

This would be the big-shot's office, I knew, for it looked like a well furnished living room in somebody's home. Over near a semicircular rough bricked fireplace that went right up to the ceiling was a gleaming black walnut desk. There were no filing cabinets, no typewriters, no bookeepers doing figures. I wondered just what they did do in offices like this.

There was a man behind the walnut desk. He was looking off to his side, staring down into the flickering lights of a middle-aged eucalyptus log fire that was laid in the base of the fireplace. It all made a nice picture.

The guy was gray at the sideburns and along what would be the brim line of his hat. But he still had plenty of hair. His face was highlighted by the fire. His eyes were large and misty.

He took them away from the fire and let them look at me. They were nice eyes, big and friendly, like a dog that

wants to lick your hand before he bites it off.

"Hi," he said in a soft voice.

"Message to Garcia received," I said.

He smiled. The smile broke—just barely—at the corners of a thin unhappy looking mouth. "This might seem funny," he said, "but how'd you like to cover a lady for a while, Gates? A singer appearing here?"

I took off my hat and reached up to adjust the new glasses. He kept staring at me, waiting for an answer.

"Sin-village specials," I said. "Something new has been added. I'm not used to them yet."

It moved him like sympathy moves the Kremlin. "All right," I finally said. "So it's a muscle job. But one thing: what's wrong your own boys can't handle it? And what makes it worth five hundred bucks?"

Maybe he turned a little red. And then again maybe he didn't. "Did you ever hear of Thyatira?" he asked me.

That didn't ring any bells. "No."

His fingers strayed over to the handle of a chestnut colored yello-phone. He idly tipped the handle up and down. "A singer from the east," he said. "Did a lot of work during the war, U.S.O."

"Oh," I said. "Sorry, just never heard of her is all."

He nodded. "On tour now. Appearing here." He cleared his throat, let the big dog eyes feel me over. "She wears about twenty thousand in rubies, Gates. Out on the streets like you and I wear a wristwatch. Naturally that calls for protection. And the big money behind this club wouldn't like it if I didn't take precautions."

I didn't have much chance to think about it. At that instant the talk box on his desk made a clicking noise and a female voice drifted out of it like lazy smoke curling out of an incense burner.

"Rex, darling?"

Scott's eyes were on me at the time. His eyelashes batted quickly and the fingers of his right hand flew back to the ivory batswitch on the box. "Yes, dear?" It came out a little strained like a rag being yanked out of a small-necked bottle.

I averted my eyes as they say in books.

"Has the man come, Rex darling?"

Unfortunately I couldn't avert my ears.

He cleared his throat. I could picture white fingers pressing hard on the ivory switch. I could also picture him wishing I were the hell somewhere else.

"Yes, dear," he murmured again. "Mr. Gates is with me now in the office."

"Oh! Gooood! I shall come down, then, no?"

"Yes, dear, please do." Scott's fingers let up on the switch. There was a little tinkly laughter from the other end. A little bedroom laughter it sounded like to me. His ears were a bright toenail lacquer red.

"Lovely child," he tried to say casually.

"Anything special I have to do?" I asked. "Like kissing the hem of her skirt or something?"

He was lighting a cigarette. He was using the hardest working lighter I'd ever seen. A lighter that went at it for what seemed like five minutes. It burned off a half inch of the cigarette doing it.

"In the afternoons mostly," he grunted. "If Thyatira wishes to go for a walk or a ride, you know. You probably won't be needed in the evenings. Five hundred flat rate. Her engagement is to be two weeks."

Nice rate. I still wondered why his own muscles couldn't handle it. "Your own boys won't do, huh?"

He looked down at the rug under his

feet as if deciding something. Then he brought up his eyes to mine and they looked nice and friendly and wanting to lick my hand again.

"I can't chance it, Gates," he said. His arm gestured around the office. "You think a guy with a few thousands could afford a layout like this? Where would I get that kind of money? As I said, I'd rather pay a little now than have trouble later—big trouble from the owners. The club, you see, doesn't want publicity of that sort. Not *this* club."

His eyes never wavered when he was saying it, but it still sounded to me like it had been read to him and he was repeating it word for word. I let it ride.

THERE was an intimate itching sound across the room and the door seemed to float back all by itself on silent hinges. I looked up.

"Rex darling!" A little kid asking, Mama is this the new doll you promised if I was a good girl?

Her face was too thin. And the way she wore her hair accentuated the thinness. It was hanging long and low down on her shoulders and from there it trailed off into glistening wisps that curled prettily in blond abandon on a sherry and gold evening gown.

Her eyes were big white tennis balls that had rather small black imperfections for irises. The blacks looked iridescent, opalish. She had a nice body, what I could see of it, with skin the color of dusty Calla lilies and hands that had learned to talk all by themseves long ago.

"Is this heem?" Her mouth asked it and her hands asked it along with her mouth. It was supposed to be a French touch, but she looked about as French as sauerkraut.

Rex Scott bowed from the hips, stepped over to her, took her right hand gracefully and led her to me. I decided it would be a nice gesture if I stood up.

"Eddie Gates," Scott said softly. "Gates, you've heard of Thyatira, of course."

I smiled a little to be polite.

"You're my nice bodee guard?" she wanted to know. She showed me her white eyes in a manner not usually reserved for strangers.

I admitted I was the bloke.

"Splendid!" She turned to Scott. "Rex darling!" She was giving him a big toothy smile but I didn't look at it too hard. I was more interested in rubies. A string of red potatoes hung from her neck. And twinkling under folds of her blond hair, ruby earrings gleamed dully from her ears.

"The Olympic Hotel, Gates," Scott was saying. "Suite four one four. I'll give Thyatira your phone number both at home and at the office. We may expect you to be on call for the next two weeks. Right?"

I said right. They stood there waiting, watching. It looked like that was all for now. I bowed myself over to the door.

" 'Bye!" the doll threw at me.

Tony Hendry was still at his desk still doing figures in a book as I went through his office. I waded softly so I wouldn't disturb him. Halfway across the room I turned my head and looked back. He was staring speculatively at me, a little puzzled frown at his eyes. He ran a moist tongue over thick sensuous lips. I went on out.

The grand duke was still at the main door which he held for me. I dug down in my pocket and pulled out a silver dollar. I held it high toward him. He reached for it just as I dropped it.

He gave me a look for that. A displeased, disapproving look. He wasn't

too displeased, however, to bend down and pick up the dollar again. When he did I brushed his shoulder. If what I felt under his brass buttoned coat was anything less than a .38 I was prepared to eat it on the spot.

Lights were all on up and down Sierra Street now. The black shades of evening had fallen from the East and Reno was waking up for another night. I took the bus over to my office, picked up my car and drove on home.

The Eldorado Arms where I hang my hat is a quiet little hole of an apartment over on the East Side where some of the older homes are. The Eldorado caters to folks like me who don't have the money for the fancy things in life.

Neither did the Eldorado. It has a very small lobby that could hold maybe one or two of the big five cent airmail stamps and not much else. That's why I was surprised when I came through the door to see a lounger in the one and only chair by the window. He was reading a newspaper.

Just how he was doing this I couldn't tell for the lamp in the corner wasn't on and there wasn't anything but darkness coming in the window by his side.

I went on up in the little elevator and forgot about him. I had occasion to remember him again, though.

I was in the kitchen opening a can of corned beef hash when I heard something and looked up. The something I'd heard had been the safety snicking off on a .32 in the right hand of the guy who could read in the dark.

"You should lock your door, friend," he said. "That way people won't come tramping in on you." He had a smile clamped between his teeth.

He came on across the kitchen, pulled the .32 back into the pit of his stomach and reached out with a long left arm.

"That's fatal," I said. "I could have you flat on your back for doing that if I wanted to."

He kept on smiling. "Why don't you try?" He took away my .38 in the shoulder holster. Then he went over and sat down on a kitchen chair.

"You must be tired," I said.

"What's your interest, Gates?"

"Huh?"

"This doll. This Thyatira. How do you come in?"

"Gee," I told him. "You sure work fast. I just met her a couple of minutes ago."

"Maybe," he grunted. "But maybe not for the first time. Talk a little, will you?" He raised the .32 and let me see it more plainly.

"If you're thinking about rubies," I said, "you can forget the deal right now. I'm hired to protect her. I looked that up once. I know exactly what the word means."

I was watching the .32 but I stopped doing that and watched him for a change. His eyes flickered a little but not enough to tell me anything.

"What's that?" he got out between his thin lips.

"Forget everything," I said. "Drop the whole thought. That woman will be covered better than the rim drive up at Tahoe during a snowstorm. It just isn't in the cards, friend, forget it."

He nodded then. "I see," he said thoughtfully. "They've told you to say rubies. You're the private dick hired to guard the doll."

"Yeah," I said.

He nodded again, clucked with his tongue against his upper teeth. "You poor sucker," he said pityingly, shaking his head.

He picked up my .38 from the kitchen table where he had laid it. "Private eyes

in Reno must be dumb," he added. He walked over to me and struck me in the jaw with the butt of my own gun as hard as he could.

Two bottom teeth almost went through my cheek. I ran my tongue around on the side of the mouth. It tasted salty and hot. I could notice that even above the throbbing of my jaw. My glasses were still on but they might as well have been at the bottom of the Truckee. Everything was getting blurry. I shook my head and wiped the back of my hand across the lips. Blood. Lots of blood.

"Thyatira," he husked at me, "is Angela Scomara, friend. My, but you bleed easy. Now you know I know who she is. Where's she got the forty thousand in bonds?"

He clipped me again. The other side of my jaw this time. The room had been blurred before. Now it got dark and red-looking. I felt my shoulder slam against the refrigerator and stay there. The big box kept me up.

"She lights cigarettes with bonds," I heard myself telling him. "Great big thousan' dolla' bonds."

He struck me again. I don't know whether it was on the right or left. The room was a merry-go-round that spun with a million brilliantly colored sparklers.

"I'm *Richard Scomara*, dick!" I heard him yell. "Now will you tell me where are those bonds?"

The merry-go-round was coming to a stop, but the big bright sparklers were whirling faster and faster. They were fuzzy and getting fuzzier. Now they were turning into little mops of blond hair that had cute ringlets. The ringlets tried to get in my mouth as they went around. I shut my teeth tight against them and fell on my face.

CHAPTER TWO

The Spin Begins

WHEN I came to again, the first thought I had was for the safety of my brand new black-rimmed glasses. I got myself up on one elbow and listened to six jet planes thundering in my head.

I tried it again. Things were dark. I couldn't see any light, I'd gone blind. I twisted my neck around and looked out the window. There was a moon. I wasn't blind; the lights were all off.

It took me only ten minutes to get to the switch on the wall. I snicked it on drunkenly and looked around. I groaned. My brand new glasses were lying on the hard solid oak floor. The pipe from the radiator that came up near the baseboard—the nice soft iron pipe—had done it. One lens was gone entirely. Bright flashes from the surrounding area told me where. The other lens was cracked in four parts.

I groaned again. The guy who liked to read in the dark had gone, of course. He'd left me without shooting me or anything. But not the apartment. He'd shot that all to hell and back. Drawers were out in the bedroom. Shirts, shorts and socks were on the bed which had been ripped apart from end to end. Even the shaving cabinet in the bathroom had gotten him curious. A reek of lilacs filled the place and the remains of a pretty golden bottle lay in the sink. That used to be my shaving lotion before my visitor had decided to see if there were any bonds in it.

Inside the right tootsie of a pair of hip boots in the closet I found the mate to my .38 which he'd taken from me. He'd missed that. I put it on, went back to the bathroom and gathered up the bro-

ken glass from the sink. Then I washed my mouth out and padded at my face with a cold wet towel.

I headed for the kitchen again. The refrigerator door was open, the thing running and defrosting at the same time. I reached in, got the bottle I keep where milk ought to be and gargled some around in my mouth. It stung like a blow torch. I gargled some more.

Finally I took a swig and dispensed with the gargle. My head was feeling maybe a tiny bit better.

I went to the phone and rang the Union Sun and Journal. I asked somebody for Dan Steacher and was lucky enough to get him.

"Dan?" I asked. "Gates. Did you ever hear of a guy named Richard Scomara?"

"Nooo," he said slowly. "Can't say I . . . Wait a minute! Something tells me something. Wasn't there a gee with that handle mixed up in some Oakland mess a while back? I don't remember for sure though. Why?"

"Just wondering. How about a singer called Thyatira? Did she come from Oakland?"

I could almost see him shaking his head. "Dunno about that one, Ed. Hear there's a thrush singing at the Singapore called Thyatira but I don't know where she hails from. They're all over, you know. Regular circuit. Trot from city to city. Just like the theatres in the vaudeville days."

"You ever hear of her before?"

"No," he admitted. "I see what you mean. Yeah, that's funny, isn't it. An unknown like that getting in the Singapore. Say! There a story here somewheres, boy?"

I laughed into the phone. "Shucks," I said. "I'm just being nosey. You know me, Dan, I gotta dig around to make a nickel in my business. Next time I'm in the neighborhood I'll drop in with a bottle."

"Rather have a story," he replied sourly. "Your whiskey never gets me any raises."

"If there *is* a story you'll get it, Danny," I said.

"Yeah. Sure. Where've I heard that before."

I dropped the phone back on the clutches and went out into the kitchen where I tried the refrigerator again for another gargle.

I reached back, felt my wallet, took it out. The five one hundred dollar bills were still there. So far so good. Also, so far, I was earning them the hard way.

There was one thing I was mighty sure of. This little spin had hardly begun. I felt it in my bones. Things had started out with too much of a bang.

I could now understand Scott wanting me instead of his own boys. This way it was I who had a sore head. This way if anybody got killed it wouldn't make any difference to the Singapore cause it'd be just me, that's all. I suddenly wondered if five hundred was worth it especially if I didn't even get a chance to spend any of it.

The phone jittered bringing me out of a slump. It also started the six jet planes again up in my head. I made the living room in one hop and silenced the thing.

"Yeah?"

"Scott." Still soft spoken, still not worried, not even anxious. "Scott," he repeated. I felt like I was pretty sure who it was.

"What do *you* want?" I asked bitterly.

"Get over to the Olympic Hotel, Gates. Right away. I've got something to show you."

"I've got something to show you, too," I said. "I've got a swollen jaw, four

loose teeth, a bump on the top of my head and a pair of broken glasses. Let's see you tie that."

A small amount of free time fed the wires while he digested that. Finally: "What happened?"

"I met up with a guy who said he didn't like me. Right in my own apartment he didn't like me. He knocked me out with the butt of my own gun."

That got me a load of sympathy big enough to be nonexistent. "You *let* him?" he wanted to know.

"Yeah. I let him. The fact he was holding a gun of his own on me at the time might have had something to do with influencing me."

"Are you able to walk?"

"Just about. And another thing. I'm not sure I want anything more to do with this mess. I don't know what I'm facing, for one thing."

"Hop over here at once, then," he said. He said it as though he hadn't even heard my last remark. I started to tell him a little more. I almost got going good before I realized I was talking to myself. I put the phone down then.

I MADE the Olympic in ten minutes. I know because when I left the apartment it was seven fifteen by the clock on my desk. And when I got to the hotel it was seven twenty-five by my wrist watch. It was then I noticed the crystal was cracked on the watch. Another beef to add to the score. The guy who carried a .32 and read in the dark had caused me a goodly mess of trouble upon very short acquaintance.

Rex Scott was standing in the middle of the living room of suite 414. The suite was done in what some people might think was a formal treatment. To me it was just one large headache of white. The walls were white. The moldings cornices, doors, door frames were white. The furniture was done in white leather. The large India wool rug that spread across a highly polished oak floor was white. Even the radio console in one corner was white. I grunted distastefully at it.

"Come with me," were Scott's first words.

He led me out of the living room, down a short white hall, past the glittering white-tiled bath and into a bedroom. Here, I was pleased to notice right away the white motif was relieved a little. A white bedspread was dotted with large tufts of mauve colored cotton sewed all over it. I caught that as soon as I walked into the bedroom and stepped on it.

I looked around. The damage done to my apartment was a whisper compared to this. The mattress lay half in, half out of the bed. Its surface was marked here and there by knife slashes and the cotton wrappers that enclosed the helix springs were peeking out in places.

The pillows had been gone over more thoroughly. The ticking was slit from end to end and down spread itself like leaves in the autumn, casually, across the floor.

Drawers were not only out, they were lying upside down in front of a large dresser. A jewel box lay empty next to one of them. A white wool rug similar to the one in the living room but smaller had been yanked up from the floor and lay in a heap in the corner.

And last but not least, all the baggage which Thyatira had with her was gutted, the contents strewn about. Most of it looked trampled upon.

Rex Scott watched me while he lit a cigarette. "Thyatira sent me up for a trinket," he said quietly. "I found the place like this."

"Nice surprise."

He didn't comment on that. Instead he shrugged, said, "Excuse me" and left the room. I heard the bathroom door close.

I pawed through the heap of clothing. Dainties, all dainties. Intimate apparel that bore the shop labels of expensive places in L.A. The skinny French dame was going to have a nice cleaner's bill on her hands, I thought.

The jewel box puzzled me. I went over, looked at it. Its bottom was covered with yellow silk that bore the imprints of many pieces of jewelry so I knew at least it *had been* functional. But there was no jewelry.

I picked up the bedspread, tossed that on the bed. Nothing under it. I did likewise with the remains of the pillows. Last I lifted the mattress and heaved it up on the springs of the bed. Nothing.

There was still the white wool rug. I lifted that. I blinked. I had been looking at so much white the contrast startled me. Winking brightly up from the floor where it lay was one ruby earring. I couldn't mistake it. If I were ten thousand miles away and five years had passed in the meantime, I shouldn't have forgotten that. I had seen it and the mate to it on the ears of the so-called Thyatira only an hour or two earlier over in the Singapore. I picked it up, slipped it in my pocket and lit a cigarette.

Rex Scott came back into the bedroom. "What do you make of it?" he asked. He was blowing smoke through his nostrils like some executives have a habit of doing. I thought on him it looked pretty good. Nice touch.

"The joint's been gone over," I said to the walls.

"Obviously. Who did it?"

I stared at him entranced. "No! No, you can't mean that? I should pick it out of the air? In my condition? Ha ha, look at me, I'm laughing."

Twin streams of smoke blow-torched out of his nostrils again. His thin, unhappy mouth was frowning. His large friendly eyes looked glazed and a little angry.

"You mentioned somebody beat you up," he said.

"Yeah. Feel the bruises. He said he was Thyatira's husband."

"*What?*"

"Yeah. Tell me what he wanted."

His eyes never wavered. "That should be easy, Gates. Look at the empty jewel box."

"Huh? In my apartment he was looking for jewels?"

His thin lower lip curled inward a little and got caught on his teeth. "I see. What *do* you think then?"

SOMETHING warned me. Ordinarily I don't pay much attention to these hunches for they're mostly all bushwa but this time—this one time—I did.

"I wouldn't know," I told him. "Would you?"

He appeared to study the floor. "This place has to be cleaned up," he said. "And considering what happened I think it will be best if you escort Thyatira home after the show tonight. I'll call at your home when it's time to come after her." He paused. Then: "Sorry you got knocked around. He's after her jewels all right."

"Her own husband?" I yelled.

That brought me a pitying look. "You didn't believe *that*," he said. "Not *that*?"

I started for the door. I'd gotten as far as the white leather davenport in the living room when I remembered something. I turned around and looked at

Scott. He was staring at me thoughtfully.

"You get the trinket she sent you after?" I threw back at him.

"No," he answered slowly. "No, I couldn't find it."

I walked over to the door, went out in the hall and closed it behind me. I remembered once again I hadn't eaten yet. And that there was a can of corned beef hash waiting for me out in my kitchen.

When I pulled up in front of the Eldorado I spotted the car at once. You can't miss a Reno prowl car—or any prowl car for that matter—once you get within a hundred yards of it. This one was parked in front of the Eldorado and had its tail lights on. Vapor was churning lazily out of its exhaust pipe. All it needed was a sign on the back saying, "Welcome to Reno, speed 25 m.p.h."

I pulled up behind it and got out. I took a couple of steps toward the entrance, just a couple. "H'sst," somebody said at me. "Gates!"

I backtracked. The voice I'd heard was from old Madrid and it had a calm warmth about it I'd recognize anywhere. It was Lieutenant Avila, Homicide, and he knew me about as well as he knew the thumbs on his hands.

"Hi," I said, looking into his brown eyes.

"Hello, Gates. You've been out, I see."

"Yeah. Nice night for it. You should try it sometime, lieutenant."

He appeared to think about that for a while. "I have been," he said. "I've been out for about twenty minutes and I think I should have stayed in. I didn't like what I found when I went out."

This was cagey stuff. Coming from a cop this was the stuff you hooted at or tried a bronx cheer on. But coming from Avila I had learned you didn't hoot and you didn't cheer. You stood quietly by and waited for what came next.

"You've done it again," he said.

"Huh?"

"How long since you've been home?"

"About a half an hour."

He nodded thoughtfully. "Yes," he agreed. "That would be right. At least you're honest about that."

I started to tire of the ride. I started to get up and go. He laid a hand on my shoulder. "Let's go up," he said.

We went into the Eldorado. Nobody in the postage stamp lobby this time. The elevator was down on the first floor where it belonged and there was a guy in it. And he was dressed in a uniform but not an operator's uniform. He recognized me and gave me a nod. One of Avila's men.

Outside in the hall before my apartment door Avila stopped. He looked at me and his eyes said they wished maybe I'd have a good one this time. Something solid and concrete he could get his claws into and tear apart, for otherwise he'd have to tear me apart instead. Sometimes I get to thinking Avila likes me—me, a private man.

He sighed. "All right, Gates, let's look at it."

The man who read without light, the man who said he was Mr. Richard Scomara and who had seemed awfully interested in what I was doing messing around with his wife—that man—had quit. Had quit cold and was beginning, already, to get the look all stiffs have when they've been setting a few minutes. The all gone look.

HE WAS dead. He'd been shot. Apparently with my own .38 which lay on the floor beside him. And it had been messy. He had

fallen on the bare floor near the wall, near the radiator right at about the spot where my glasses had hit the iron pipe.

"Well?" asked Avila.

"You're fast," I told him. "He wasn't like this a half hour ago when I left the apartment. And already you know about it?"

"Not fast," he said. "One of your neighbors heard the shot. Called the department. On the way over I guessed whose apartment it would be." He sighed. "Who is he, how did it happen?"

"No bells ringing?" I asked.

"We don't know him yet," Avila admitted.

"I do," I said. "Tonight this guy came up here when I was getting something to eat. He pulled a .32. He took away my gun. He let me have the butt of it over the noggin. When I dropped, my glasses fell off and broke on the iron pipe there." I pointed it out to him.

Avila looked surprised. He has a good memory. "Glasses?"

"Recent addition," I said. "You can check that with the Crown Optical Company downtown."

"Oh."

"And then," I added, "I pulled out my other gun and shot him dead." I unholstered the .38 I'd gotten out of the rubber boot. I handed it to him.

"This hasn't been fired," he said.

"No."

"Where'd you go after you shot him?"

I grinned. "I went downtown and put an ad in the paper for somebody to come get him off the floor."

I'll say one thing for Avila. He can listen and he can listen. And when he's through listening his ears are still open for more. He spoke softly: "If you didn't shoot him show me who did—and why?"

I felt a little like Dr. Thorndyke, but it had to be done. I went around the guy's feet, examined his rubber heels, took out my penknife and probed in the rubber. I dug out a fragment of glass.

"Part of my glasses," I said. "And look at his heels. Since the glass got embedded he's been outside. The rubber is still dusty from the streets." Somehow it didn't sound as good telling it as it seemed to me when I'd thought about it.

Avila took my penknife and probed for himself. He got out another piece of glass, carefully placed it in an envelope. He looked thoughtfully at me. "It doesn't mean a thing," he reminded me.

"No. I'll admit that. But it looks good. After he knocked me out he ransacked the joint. Look for yourself. I came to, had a drink to brace me and went out After I'd gone he came back here. And that's that."

"You still haven't said who did it—if you didn't."

I gave him a helpless shrug. "My gosh!" I said. "How would I know that? What I've told you is all I know completely."

Avila rubbed his chin with a soft looking brown hand. A small hand for a cop, a hand that looked like it would be better fitted for the bow of a violin than for the butt of a police special.

"You went out. Why?"

"I got a call from a client. Hurry call."

"I see. You said you knew this man?"

"Richard Scomara—*he said* he was."

Avila rolled that around for a while. It hit. "There's something about that name," he whispered. "I can feel it but I can't tag it. Not here, I don't think. Southland where the winters are all rain."

I grinned.

"Want to tell me who your client is?"

I decided it wouldn't do any harm. "Sure. Rex Scott over at the Singapore."

"Want to tell me any about Scott?"

"No."

"All right. Tell me instead why you didn't murder this Scomara."

I thought he would have been quick on that one. "Look," I said. "If I'm playing for keeps I'm not doing it here for one thing. Second, I wouldn't leave him here afterward. Third, I wouldn't let my gun lie there on the floor by the body."

"It is your gun then?"

"Sure. If you check it you might even find my fingerprints."

Avila looked at me for a long long time. Then he said: "Perhaps you'd better get a hotel room for the night, Gates. You wouldn't get any rest here. Department men will be climbing over this place in minutes."

He was kidding, naturally. "Thanks," I said. "I'll be running along then."

His eyes lowered to the body again. He talked as though he were more interested in it than in me. "This one time," he said softly. "You're telling the truth, at least this one time."

"Huh?"

"This man wasn't killed here. He was brought here right after he died."

I hadn't caught that, I sure hadn't.

"Look at his right hand."

I kneeled down and picked up the hand. Embedded in the palm were more pieces of broken lens. Several pieces. The flesh looked like so much studded putty. And no blood.

"Death wasn't instantaneous," said Avila. "He bled, look at his coat. But there's not much on the floor. Also, there's no blood where the glass cut his hand. Somebody killed him, brought him here, dumped the body on the floor."

There was something wrong with that, though. It tickled me. It was so very very wrong that I brought it out and let Avila have a good long look at it.

"Somebody phoned from here and said they heard the shot, you told me."

He nodded slowly. "That's true. That's what somebody said to me over the phone." He smiled a little; a little ruefully. "It ain't necessarily so, though," he whispered.

CHAPTER THREE

Special for $3.98

I GOT a bite to eat—after all that time—over at the QneeQ.

After that I fixed myself up with a bed bottle at the drugstore diagonally across the street. After that I got a tourist cabin for the night down on South Virginia. I called the Singapore. The skinny guy who did the bookkeeping at the club answered. I gave him the cabin's phone number, told him to tell Rex Scott. Then I turned out the lights in the place and went down town again.

On Second between Virginia and Center are a string of pawnshops that keep open mainly by trafficking in worn-out wedding rings. I remembered this was Reno, mecca of enchantment for the tourist—depository of broken vows for the disillusioned. I looked up Virginia toward Commercial Row. The big arch across the street was still there. It still announced to the uninitiated: "*The Biggest Little City In The World.*" I had almost forgotten about that sign.

I turned down the street of the golden balls.

Midway in the block was an establishment that was a little seedier than the rest. The two big plate glass windows in front bore the legend, "Johnny's Jewelry Joint" and I could see when I looked through the glass doorway that Johnny still ran the place. Johnny was an old

Spaniard called Jose. I went in quietly.

I dug around in my pocket, pulled out the ruby earring, laid it on the glass counter that stood between Jose and I. Jose was staring at me, his old gray mustache twitching a little from the nervous jerkings of his shaggy head. There was a brown wheat-straw cigarette dangling from his lips and it was dead. He made sucking noises at it anyway.

"How much?" I asked, indicating the ruby earring.

He stared at me with an old-world expression of disgust written in the deep lines of his tanned face. His faded blue eyes looked as though I'd just insulted the memory of his late lamented wife.

"Pah!" he said behind the mustache.

"What's it worth? It can't be that bad."

This time he reached up and took the wheat-straw cigarette out of his lips. He looked at it. He threw it on the floor, slid back the glass door behind the showcase and reached in. He brought up a tray full of assorted earrings. He selected a red one, dropped it on the counter. It was a duplicate of the one I'd picked up off the floor in suite 414 of the Olympic Hotel.

I looked at the tray. A sign on it read: "Anything on this tray special $3.98."

"You're sure?" I asked. "You're absolutely certain?"

He didn't bother to answer that. His shaggy head kept on jerking and his long gray mustache twitched. A cuckoo clock over against the wall behind him suddenly let out with a razzberry. The place reeked of stale tobacco smoke.

"Thanks," I said. I picked up my earring, walked down the long aisle of used typewriters, second-hand Jap rifles with memories, a Nazi parade sword or two. At the door I thought of something. I turned, grinned at him. "My best wishes go with you, señor," I said, Mexican fashion.

I could hear him spitting as I closed the door. I went back to my cabin to think that one over.

At two-twelve A.M. the call came through, and I trotted on over to the Singapore.

The grand duke was still at the door, but he wasn't alone this time. Scott was standing with him. When I drove up he nodded, turned, and disappeared through the Singapore's big front door.

I got out just as Scott's Caddy pulled up behind my coupe. I walked over to the door and stood alongside the grand duke.

"Nice night," I said. He said nothing.

"Knocking off pretty soon?" I tried again.

He said more of nothing. His dignity was getting me down. He looked tonier than a royal coronation. His brass buttons shone from the overhead illumination on the club façade.

"What do we hear from Quentin these days?" I asked.

"Oh hell!" he growled. He opened the big door and went inside.

Thyatira came out in less than half a minute.

"Meester Gates!" she cooed. "How verry nice. No?"

A few passersby turned around to look. I gave them a stony glare and took Thyatira's arm. I led her over to the Caddy, peeked inside. The same chauffeur who had driven me earlier was behind the wheel. I helped her in, got in myself, sat alongside of her.

"You can spare the French accent, Mrs. Scomara," I told her.

"Oh?" she said. She was silent after that.

I helped her out. We walked through

the big marble lobby of the Olympic to the bank of elevators.

"Four," I told the operator. We walked down the silent hall. She gave me a key. I opened 414, clicked the lights in the living room. She came on in after me. I looked at the door, closed it, told her to sit down. I went through the rest of the suite. Everything was in nice order again. No one was in the place besides the two of us.

I WENT back to the living room. "O.K.," I told her. "Put on the chain after I leave. Don't open the door again till I come after you. That'll be anytime you call me." I wrote out my cabin phone number and laid it on a white end table next to the ivory phone.

"Meester Gates?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't go yet, please." She sounded as though she were pleading. I looked at the ringlets of hair that dropped on her shoulders.

"You've been so kind. It's late. Wouldn't you like a leetle dreenk? Just one?"

"O.K.," I said. "I can drink it without the French accent, though." She didn't look as though she were dying by degrees over the death of her husband.

That meant she didn't know.

She made a little face at me and disappeared in the bedroom. I looked around. A big white jardenier of red roses had been added since I'd been here earlier. It was sitting on the middle of the white, waxed surface of a grand piano. I could almost smell the roses from here.

She came to the doorway of the bedroom again. It hadn't taken her long. The golden sherry evening dress was gone. Now she had on a quilted white dressing gown that looked like it had grown there. One dusty leg was sticking out almost to her hip. She herself was in the act of lighting a cigarette. She owled me over the flame. She winked. She went in the bathroom. I heard water running. And something else. When she showed again she had two glasses. She gave me one. It looked like whiskey, smelled like whiskey, was whiskey. Six ounces of whiskey. I sipped it.

"What's your first name?" she asked me. She sat down very near to me on the white davenport. I told her.

"Edward," she repeated. "Nice." She began to giggle. It wasn't a French giggle. It was a giggle that was used to cheap hall rooms or anywhere else that was convenient.

"You should practice that," I told her. "It's out of character."

That got me another giggle. She edged a little closer, let me smell the perfume of her breasts. "Eddie," she whispered. "Eddie, Eddie, Eddie."

I sipped the whiskey a little more. "Was there something else?" I asked.

"Oh, Eddie." This time like a kid whose feelings have been hurt. "Eddie!" she said it again.

Her left arm all of a sudden found itself on my shoulder—like that. And strange as it may seem her dressing gown fell open just a little more than a dressing gown can all by itself.

"You're cute," she said. "Honey," she added.

I got up, put the whiskey glass on the end table and went over to a window. looked out. The unrelieved whiteness of the room was in my eyes like the stuffed up feeling you get at a wake when there're too many flowers.

"If this is a nice way of finding out if I see your husband tonight, the answer is yes," I said to the window. I turned around and faced her. Her eyes were

blinking rapidly and there were fear lines etching around her thin mouth.

"You might as well know now," I continued. "You'll find out in the morning anyway. He's dead. I didn't kill him but he's dead."

Her arm was in the same position on the sofa. But the fear lines had gone from her face. It was the nice dusty Calla lily again.

And she was grinning.

She threw back her head and began to laugh. She got up from the sofa and flung herself in a nicely executed ballet maneuver on the white wool rug. A little laughing, bubbling song broke from her lips and she swung her white arms.

I couldn't tell what the tune was, but it sounded happy and carefree and loaded with Satan and sin.

He robe parted completely and she stopped whirling, stood there facing me. She was as naked as a new-laid egg. She let me look.

She was a statue. A rather thin alabaster statue that anybody could see in any gallery anywhere. The only difference was that she wore a rope of imitation rubies around her neck, and she would have me think they were real.

"Come to me, Eddie!" she breathed. "Come to me quickly!"

I took a deep breath. "There's something else you'd probably like to know," I said. "Your husband—the last time I saw him alive—seemed provoked because I couldn't explain what you'd done with some bonds. He didn't mention what bonds, just bonds."

That got her. That one was the big one. She tried to get out from under it but the white tennis balls she used for eyes couldn't take it. They flicked. They flicked once again.

Her face went a bone white that looked as though it had aged fifty years. It made the whites of her large eyes like round hard snowballs with spidery red roadmaps crisscrossing them. Her breath was going in and out between her teeth with a hissing sound.

She gathered the robe around her and fled from the living room. I heard the white bedroom door slam. I heard her throw herself down on the mauve spotted white bedspread inside.

I went over to the hall door, opened it, tried the knob from the outside, shut it quietly behind me. There was a taste in my mouth that wasn't whiskey.

SCOTT'S big Cadillac and Scott's chauffeur were gone when I got out to the street again. But standing at the curb right in front of the entrance was another car, a more modest car. A car that advertised its wares with two whip aerials, one in front and one in back. Just looking at it made me sigh. I walked over to Avila's private prowl job.

Its motor was churning quietly. Avila himself was behind the wheel and there was a little welcoming smile on his lips.

"Just passing by," he murmured. "Thought maybe you'd like a lift."

I got in. "I didn't know I'd been tailed," I told him. That made his smile broaden. He turned to me and flashed it. His nice brown eyes twinkled along with the smile. "Coming from you, Gates," he said, "that's a compliment. The sergeant in the elevator over at your apartment. Remember? He's quite good."

"All right," I said. "You made your point. What now?"

The Ford pulled away from the curb. "On your way home?" he asked.

"I was."

"You still are."

The big neons of the gaming clubs had Virginia Street between Commercial

Row and the Truckee River bridge all aglow like one massive Christmas tree. Crowds were still on the sidewalks—even at that hour—walking, talking, laughing. The only discordant note were a few dark windows of department stores . . .

"Reno's pretty at night," said Avila. I didn't answer that. "A city where an honest man can make a nice living in the private end of our business. City's growing bigger all the time, too, did you know?"

"The Twenty-Thirty Club meets Tuesdays," I said. "I don't know whether they've got a speaker lined up for next week or not."

He stopped grinning. "I'm going to be quite frank with you, Gates. I'm even going to tell you some police business. And that's strictly against the rules, you know."

"Thanks," I said.

"We've made that stiff tonight. He told you the truth. He *was* Richard Scomara. Wanted in Oakland, San Diego, and Los Angeles for grand larceny. We've saved the State of California some expense."

"You'll probably get a thank you card from Warren tomorrow," I said.

"I thought maybe you'd know what he was doing in Reno. After all he did come up to your apartment tonight."

We were past the business section now, heading south on Virginia. The big places were thinning out. An occasional gas station was still open. We passed the QneeQ. Shades on the big front window were drawn and there was a sign on the door. I knew that sign. "Closed Thursdays," it said.

"Nothing to say, Gates?"

"We were strangers," I said. "Also, I've got a client. I told you that. I told you who he is. I'll even tell you what kind of a job it is. I'm supposed to be bodyguard for a thrush at the Singapore."

Avila started to whistle. I looked over at him. His lips were rounded and his eyes were on the street ahead of us. The tune he was whistling sounded like an old Spanish lullaby.

"This thrush," I added, "needs protection, Scott told me, because she's in the habit of wearing twenty thousand bucks worth of rubies on her. It made sense when he told it to me."

"Yes. Yes, that would make sense. But this—this thrush—I didn't know there were any big names at the Singapore this week. Who is she?"

"Named Thyatira," I said. "I've never heard of her."

He thought about it some. "Neither have I," he admitted. "That's odd."

"I suppose she can wear rubies without us hearing of her."

That stopped that for a while. Finally Avila looked over at me. There was a puzzled expression in his brown eyes. "Queer name," he said. "This your motel?"

He knew it was my motel. He pulled in, even drove up to my particular cabin. " 'Night, Gates," he said.

I grinned. "My car is over on Sierra Street in front of the Singapore," I said. "I'll need it in the morning. How about a lift downtown?"

"You didn't look around, Gates," he replied, pointing. I looked. Alongside of the cabin was a Plymouth coupe—my Plymouth coupe. I felt a little silly looking at it.

"Careless of me to leave the keys in the ignition," I said.

"Wasn't it, though?" He put his hand in his pocket, brought out a key, handed it to me. "Just to show you, Gates," he said softly. "The police in Reno are hardworking and conscientious. They de-

serve a break now and then from the citizens."

"Yeah," I said. "Thanks."

His brown eyes were balling at me as I got out of the sedan. They followed me, looked up at me as I closed the door in his face. "The last known job this Scomara pulled was in Los Angeles, Gates, he got away with forty thousand from a nightclub down there." He waited.

I said nothing.

"I'm telling you too much police business," he growled. The Ford's wheels spun on the loose gravel of the court and the car made a U-turn, headed out toward the street. I watched its twin tail lights disappear up Virginia.

THE hands on my wrist watch showed three-thirty through the cracked crystal. I took it off, wound it, laid it on the dresser beside the bed. Then I sampled the bed bottle I'd gotten in the drugstore. It went down bitter and harsh with that unsatisfying taste you get from a cup of strong coffee that's been laying on the stove half the night.

I turned down the blue spread and laid down. The cabin was cold. I got up, snicked the switch on the wall heater, turned off the lights in the place and laid down again. Only the dim cheery glow from the heater made a dent in the darkness, and that wasn't enough to bother anybody—least of all me.

I tipped the bottle carefully, took another sample. This time it wasn't so bad. I tipped it again. This time it was good. I did it again just to see. It stayed good.

All of a sudden the cabin began to feel warm and cozy and dreamy. And then I thought of something funny. I just remembered that the metal seal on my bed bottle had been broken and yet I was sure as sin I hadn't broken it. That was funny. "Ha, ha," I said to myself. "Bottle breaks seal all by itself. Ha ha."

I tried to sit up to take another swallow. I couldn't sit up. I tried—hard this time—to put the bottle to my lips to take another swallow. I couldn't put the bottle to my lips. I tried to squeeze the bottle. I couldn't do that either. I heard it gurgling all over the floor.

My eyes were still working though. And my ears. I heard something over by the privvy door. I looked over there. A shadow, darker than the mist that was enveloping me, was moving from that door and coming over this way.

Now the shadow came past the glow of the wall heater. The shadow was a pair of long thin legs in trousers. The shadow came on. The shadow leaned over me. The shadow hit me on the head with a sap. Just before the cheery red glow in the cabin turned to blackness I caught a small reflection from a pair of black rimmed glasses. Just like the kind of glasses I used to wear before mine got busted. I closed my eyes.

Sun streaming in the window gave me a pain in my left eye. I opened it, closed it quick. I heaved my body a little out of the path of the sunbeam. I got sick for that.

I lay still a little. The room finally straightened out. The place was an inferno of heat. I turned my head and looked at the wall heater. It was still on.

I lay still some more, gathering my strength. Finally I took a deep breath, held it, jumped from the bed, smacked the wall heater switch with the flat of my hand. I just made it to the toilet before I got sick again.

A half hour of that and I went out in the bedroom on wobbly pins. The whiskey bottle was on the floor beside the bed. It was nearly empty. A dark stain

on the carpet spread out in a wide area around the neck of the bottle. I knew now who had broken the seal and why.

My wrist watch said nine-thirty. It was still ticking of course. I went back to the privvy, washed my face and combed my hair. Then I left the cabin and went out to my coupe.

The keys weren't in my pocket where I'd put them. They were in the door lock on the passenger's side and the door was unlocked. I looked in. I had a passenger. His teeth should have been yanked when he was a kid, and he had feet that were born for dancing slippers and I knew without looking that his fingers would be yellow as a Chinaman's.

He was dead and my nickel-plated .38 which lay on the seat near his body had got him that way.

I went back in the cabin, picked up the almost empty bottle, corked it, locked the cabin again and got in my coupe from the driver's side. There was one private citizen in Reno who was going to give the conscientious, hardworking police a break. And he was going to do it for one very good and substantial reason, namely to save his precious thirty-six year old hide.

But there was something, hide or no hide, that had to be done first. I lifted the revolver gingerly by the end of the barrel, pushed it under the seat. The bottle I stuck in the glove compartment. Then I got out, locked the car, put the keys in my pocket and walked out of the court. There was a guy who owed me something. I was going after him with my bare hands. I caught the Virginia Street bus.

The anodyzed aluminum facade of the Singapore glittered in the sunlight. The grand duke hadn't come on duty yet and the big chromium front door of the place stood shining and unattended. I went on in.

The place had that empty, abandoned look that even the toniest places have in the early morning hours. There was a detergent smell coming from the mahogany barroom on the left. The gaming tables were like so many white covered coffins.

There wasn't anyone in sight although I could hear somebody working in the barroom. It sounded like he was waxing the floor. I went through the dining room. I stopped at a small door at the extreme end of one wall and knocked. Then I turned the handle and went in.

THE BOOKKEEPER'S desk was there. The typewriters were there. Even a big safe which I hadn't noticed before showed plainly now. I noticed it particularly for on its big door were two words: "Singapore Club" in gilt letters. The door was gaping open showing its insides like sins brought out into the sunlight. All open doors have that effect on me. There was no one in the office but me.

I floated across the heavy rug to Scott's door. I didn't bother to knock. I went in. This was deserted too. The rough bricked fireplace was black and cold. And the place smelled like a theatre without any patrons. Only a small desk lamp on Scott's desk gave illumination to the place.

Sometimes, after it's all over, you think to yourself, shucks, a blind man could have played it smarter, and you wonder what possessed you to do what you did. But that's when it's all over and done with. Probably I should have called Lieutenant Avila right then. I didn't. I went back to Tony Hendry's office and stared around.

The big safe fascinated me. I stood

there for several minutes just looking at it. And then I knew why Thyatira's bedroom had been torn to pieces. I knew why I had been knocked out and my apartment ransacked. I knew, almost why everything else had happened.

I grabbed a taxi and took it over to the Olympic Hotel.

The door to suite 414 looked as though it wouldn't be locked on the inside. I didn't know why, I just thought it looked that way. I tried it. I was wrong. So I knocked.

The door opened quickly and I looked into the barrel of a .32 automatic held in the skinny hand of a man who wore thick, black plastic-framed glasses.

"Never get enough, do you, peeper," said Tony Hendry. I thought that, considering how late he'd been up the night before, he looked surprisingly fresh. He even had a clean shave, unlike myself.

"Talk, peeper," he said. He sounded like little Joe Siracuse had sounded before he came to rest in my Plymouth coupe.

I looked around. Thyatira was over by the white grand piano, encircled by several leather bags on the floor at her feet. She was looking speculatively at me. She was dressed to go out in a purple suit of hard, shiny gabardine. She was clutching a red handbag in both hands.

I looked back at the .32. Tony Hendry's makeup was on crooked. The imprint of lipstick was plastered in a jagged line across his lips but one end traveled up farther than his lips went. I looked back at Thyatira. Her lips looked about the same shade of red.

"Talk," he said again. "I want to know how much you know and how far the police are behind."

"Sure," I lied. "The police are behind but not far. I called homicide from the lobby on the way up. Lieutenant Avila and his boys will be here before you can pull that trigger."

He waited. The .32 began to stick out and jerk a little. I talked.

"Thyatira was married to a guy named Richard Scomara," I said. "Between them they knocked over some swell places in California. She'd case the joint, Scomara would wrap it up afterwards. Then she decided to go it alone. Probably the climate was getting a little too warm for her rich blood. She grabbed off the last loot, changed it into bonds and came up here to Reno."

I gave the woman a look out of the corner of my eyes. She grabbed involuntarily at the handbag, pulled it into her stomach. That's where the bonds would be now, I figured.

"Kill him, honey," she said casually.

Tony Hendry's fat lips puffed in and out at me. He was interested, but not frightened. He had the .32, he didn't need to be. I wondered if he noticed how my knees kept trying to buckle.

"She got Scott to hire me—probably paid the 500 herself—thinking Scomara would tangle with me and that if I was on my toes I'd knock him off. It was nice, only I wasn't on my toes." I tried to keep my voice just right, showing him how silly this all was.

"More," he said. His voice sounded to me like I was scaring him as much as Tojo scared MacArthur in '44.

I jacked up a grin on my lips. "The rest is easy," I said. "Look at the dame. She'd try to make anything in pants. She even tried to make me, so that shows you. When she came back here last night and found her place a wreck, she decided I hadn't been very successful with Scomara. So she just did what she always has done, what she always will do. She wrapped herself around poor Joe Siracuse's stir-brain and got him to knock off

Scomara—with my own gun yet. Joe dropped Scomara in my apartment for a nice homey touch.

"But she'd lost an earring while she was here. She sent Scott to find it for her. Poor guy, he probably didn't know what kind of a black widow he was playing with. When he discovered the place a mess he called me. I found the earring. I also found out it cost approximately one buck ninety-nine without excise tax. That made the bejewelled Thyatira a phony like her rubies."

The .32 kept pointing at me steadily. For a skinny guy he had pretty good nerves, or maybe he was fascinated by the unwinding of the thing. I didn't know. His eyes behind the black-rimmed glasses owled brightly, interested, almost amused.

"Trouble was," I continued, "poor little Joe expected more honey from the same hive. And when he found out there wasn't going to be anymore for him he probably started to cause a little trouble. Maybe threats. Who knows what goes on in the mind of a two-time loser?"

I THOUGHT the .32 jumped a little. I wasn't sure. Then I looked at the skinny fingers around the butt. They were white and strained looking. I looked up at his face. He was feeling uneasy now.

"So the woman went to work again—on you this time. She figured it was time to leave Reno. She got you to see how nice she was built and what promises she could make. You were probably fed up with the Singapore anyway. There wasn't anything there for you. So poor little Joe had to die. And since I was still around it would be handy if I were framed with it. Which one of you thought of that touch?"

The .32 jumped a little. It looked itchy now. "That all, peeper?" The words jerked out of his mouth.

"Isn't it enough? You officially became the dame's next fall guy when you got her bonds out of the Singapore's safe this morning—and cleaned out Scott's receipts at the same time. And now you're headed maybe for Las Vegas."

"How much do the police know?" he asked tightly.

"All of it."

That bought me a nice grin. A relieved, pleasant grin. "You told them all of it when you made that quick call in the lobby on the way up?"

I could see what he meant and it didn't do my backbone any good.

"Kill him, honey!" said the woman again. She came out from behind the circle of baggage. "Kill the louse and let's get the hell out of here."

"Yeah," he said, softly. I could feel the slug tearing into me already. I could feel it burning like iodine on a fresh cut. "Yeah," he said again. "Back into the bedroom, peeper." He kept his eyes on me, twisted his mouth to one side. "Take a couple bags down and pay the desk, honey. I'll be with you in a sec."

I was facing Hendry. The gun was a magnet drawing my eyes, but my brain was sending out signals that made me look around for straws to clutch at. There weren't any. As the woman picked up two small suitcases and started for the door there still weren't any. And as she started to lay one of them down to pull the door open a little wider, I didn't think anything had changed particularly in my favor—even when the door came open all by itself.

If I thought of anything at all, I thought only that some poor bellhop was going to stick his nose into something he'd never get over. Even when the sight

on a .45 nosed through the opening I didn't change the odds any.

But that was before I saw a couple of big brown eyes that were looking into the room like the eyes on a mongrel dog who wants to lick your hand before he bites it off. A voice, a nice deep voice that had it added up fine and dandy, followed the gun and the eyes into the room.

"Going somewhere, dear?" the voice said.

The woman screamed. She dropped the bags with a thud. She screamed again and threw herself at the arm that held the .45.

Tony Hendry came out of it swiftly. His .32 made a lightning swing and went off at the same time. He missed. Plaster chipped and fell to the floor from the white wall about knee-high at Scott's side. I hit Hendry with one hundred and seventy-five pounds of me.

He must have sensed it coming. His back arched and one arm flew back protectively, warded off the blow, toppled me with a crash to the oak floor. I grabbed at one thin pants leg going down.

The woman screamed again. Scott's gun hadn't gone off yet. She clung to his arm, her teeth sinking into the flesh of his wrist. Her eyes were blazing with hate.

I looked up at Scott. There were pain lines across his mouth, but they didn't come from the sinking teeth. This was pain of a different sort, the kind that a bandage and a couple of weeks couldn't erase. I felt a little sorry—honestly—for the guy whose leg I was hanging onto.

I yanked. Hendry lurched, brought down the gun. It was meant to hit me in the face, but the gun didn't get around in its swinging arc fast enough. I jerked the skinny leg hard and he toppled like a tall poplar going down in a high wind. His .32 went off with a snapping sound and the woman screamed for the fourth time.

It seemed funny—like an echo that comes back stronger than the original sound. Hendry jumped spasmodically on top of me and then lay still. For a minute I didn't fully get it. Then I did.

Rex Scott was still holding the .45 and a little smoke still came from the barrel. He was looking down at a stain on the front of his light gray suit. The woman lay at his feet, her teeth still trying to bite but doing a rather poor job on the hard oak floor. She was very, very dead. She was as dead as the skinny body of Tony Hendry who lay on top of me, and she had died not knowing she'd spoiled Scott's suit with her blood.

"She certainly wasn't a lady," I said to anybody who'd listen.

Scott's eyes had left off looking at the suit and were eating the thing on the floor at his feet. "She was a good woman," he whispered. "Whatever you say about her now, she was a good woman once." He looked at me, gave me a little time to argue it if I wanted to. I couldn't argue, for I didn't know.

I crawled on my hands and knees over to the telephone and called Lieutenant Avila at homicide.

THE DAY was shot. The sun had already left Nevada and was tucking itself into bed out in the Pacific. Avila's office was chilly and I was tired, more tired than I could remember ever having been before.

Avila looked weary, too, but it was a different weariness than mine. He was weary from asking questions and I was weary from answering them. We were two little babes in the wood weary as could be. I felt like suggesting to him

that we lie down on the floor and curl up for a couple of hours.

He stared hard at a desk full of papers. In black and white they represented the day's questions and answers. But not all. There were a couple more yet. There always are. You get to the point where you believe with all your heart and soul there are no more, and there's bound to be a couple more—and then a couple more after that. But what you really believe inside your heart is that you never will be finished.

Avila seemed to have digested most of it. There was only one thing that didn't want to go down with the rest. "There's never been anything against Scott before," he said.

"No," I said. "I guess you're right."

"And the Singapore's a pretty expensive place—a place that ordinarily hires big names. This Thyatira wasn't big. Nobody ever heard of her."

"Except in two-bit joints," I said. "No, the Singapore didn't hire talent like her."

Avila waited. He knew I knew what he wanted. And there wasn't any reason for not telling him. "She was in the U.S.O. during the war," I said. "Scott met her overseas. Women were a little scarce then; she probably got inside of him. But after it was over, she wanted to keep on with the entertaining and he was the kind of a guy that if she wanted it that way, then *he* was happy he could make *her* happy. He let her. But she couldn't work the Singapore under normal conditions for it was a little out of her class."

Avila scribbled some. He looked up.

"Where she met this Scomara I wouldn't know," I continued. "But they started a little racket. She'd case the place, he'd do the work. It was O.K. until the police caught up with it. Then she figured it was time for a fade-out. She left Scomara holding the satchel, turned the forty thousand into government bonds and left California for good. She was safe that way. He could kill her if he caught her but he couldn't cash the bonds. You saw them yourself. They're not co-owner. She needed protection so she came to Reno and begged Scott to let her play the Singapore."

"And he let her," mused Avila. "I wonder why?"

"You're tired," I told him. "You'd be the first to see it if you weren't. This woman was eating at him. He'd been away from her. For quite a spell. It looked like a nice domestic dream to him, don't you see? The owners of the Singapore down in L.A. wouldn't ever hear of it probably—or if they did it wouldn't matter, he could shrug them off. He was operating the club and profitably."

"He did the hiring when you were called in," Avila mentioned.

"Yeah. She picked up some fake rubies, told him they were real. I doubt if he knew what was in the envelope she'd given him to keep in the safe for her. He was that kind of a guy, he wouldn't question. There are still some left like him you know."

Avila sighed deep within him.

"You'd better go home and get some rest," he said. "Drop in tomorrow. I don't yet know whether you still have a license."

"What?" I yiped.

That made him shrug. "You wouldn't be using it any more today would you?"

I guessed he was right. I left the office, walked down the long hall to the door. And then out down the street.

The big illuminated arch was still there, up above the noisy traffic.

"*The Biggest Little City In The World,*" it still said to the tourists.

I went on home.

NO MATCH FOR MURDER

Martin had murdered his wife Marcia many times—clubbed her with an ax, shot her, poisoned her and boiled her in oil. But this time it wasn't just wishful thinking.

By DAY KEENE

The reek of gasoline was strong — that much of his plan, at least, had worked.

THERE was the usual crowd on the five-fifteen. Most of them read their papers. A few of them played bridge. Almost all of them knew Reece Martin. Jim Glade who lived just across the hollow from the Martin hilltop home rode in the same seat with him. But not one of his fellow suburbanites were later able to say: *"I knew he was going to do it . . . I could tell by the shifty*

look in his eyes that he was up to something . . . There, said I to myself, sits a potential murderer."

A pudgy little man with a hairline mustache he mistakenly believed made him resemble Errol Flynn, Martin looked like anything but a man on his way home to murder his wife. No one would have believed him if he had told them. True he had killed Marcia many times. He had clubbed her with the ax he used to split the kindling for the fire place, he had shot and poisoned her; he had boiled her in oil. But this time it wouldn't be wishful thinking. This time he really meant to do it. He had Sayre to think of now.

He thought of her, watching the lonely countryside fly by. Nothing so nice as Sayre had ever happened to him before. He tried to repress an ecstatic shudder and failed.

Beside him, Glade glanced up from his paper. "You'd think they'd have more heat on this damn train, wouldn't you?"

"Wouldn't you?" Martin agreed.

Thinking of Sayre was a mistake. He'd have to watch himself until this thing was over. The least mistake would send him to the chair. Chair—Sayre. It bothered him that they rhymed. He put the thought from his mind and tried to concentrate on his paper.

A WOMAN in London had quadruplets . . . Vishinsky had made the inevitable mistake and vetoed one of his own proposals . . . A bank teller had embezzled twenty thousand dollars . . .

The sum stuck in his throat and made it ache. By selling the house, the sum received, plus Marcia's insurance would just about balance his books. He and Sayre would have to live on his salary. There would be no more fur coats and night clubs for a time. But Sayre wouldn't mind that. She loved him for himself. She said so. After they were married they would rent a small apartment in town and live within his means until he figured out some way to make a killing. He was certain he would. A man couldn't help but be a success with a wife like Sayre for an inspiration.

He compared both women in absentia. Marcia was large and solid and capable, a veritable truck of a woman whose life was run on a well-planned schedule. Sayre was tiny and fragile and helpless. He could still see her the day she had followed her sheer blouse into his office and announced that Personnel had said she was to be his new secretary.

It had been "that way" with both of them from the start. He hadn't meant it should go so far, but caught in the tide of her physical charms and obvious admiration for him he had allowed himself to drift until slightly to his own amazement he had become an active swimmer in the flood of their affair. Sayre didn't think he was stupid, futile, or a failure. She wouldn't insist on picking his suits and ties for him or telling him when to blow his nose. She thought he was smart, a success, and handsome. She admired his tastes and catered to them. She would never remark in the presence of others: "Oh, Reece is a fair provider. But when it comes to the facts of life he wouldn't have sense enough to come in out of the rain without me telling him to do so."

Resentment colored his face as Martin stared surreptitiously around the coach. He knew what the other men called him when they thought he was out of earshot. He had heard it the first time the night of the last country club dance. They called him "Yes, Dear,"

from his fifteen year old habit of agreeing with Marcia to save an argument. Some of the boys had been getting up a poker game and one of them had suggested asking him to sit in only to be overruled by Harry Thomas.

"Ah, to hell with 'Yes, Dear'," Thomas had vetoed the suggestion. "We'll just get going good and Marcia will decide poker isn't good for his health or something."

The name had stuck. He had heard it several times since. But it would be different after tomorrow. Sayre was satisfied with his knowledge of the facts of life. In fact he had been able to teach her one or two. She looked forward to their stolen rendezvous as eagerly as he did. But all that was behind them now, or would be by morning. By morning Marcia would be dead and after a few discreet weeks of mourning he would sell the house, use the sum so realized plus Marcia's insurance to balance his books and he and Sayre would begin life all over.

He took his new pipe from his pocket, tamped it full of tobacco and discovered he had no match.

Jim Glade offered him his lighter. "I didn't know now you smoked, Reece."

"I don't, very often," Martin admitted.

The pipe was an affectation, purchased mainly because Sayre thought pipe smokers looked manly. He must remember to buy some matches in the drug store across from the station. Matches were essential to his plan. He couldn't very well go to one of the neighbors after he had killed Marcia and say: *"Pardon me, but might I borrow a match? I have just murdered my wife and I want to destroy the evidence."*

The imagined dialogue amused him. Character and simplicity were the essense of his plan. Marcia was a bad, if determined driver. It was the only thing she did poorly. The fact was common knowledge. There were innumerable battered fenders in Wooded Hills that could bear testimony. Marcia could never seem to remember the relative positions of first and reverse gear since the gear shift lever had been moved up under the wheel. And now there was the thirty foot cut bank. Marcia had almost backed over it several times. Martin meant that she should—tonight.

The train jolted to a stop at Fairview, Glendale, Shady Haven. Papers were folded, bridge games ended, men got off. Still Martin thought of the cut bank with pleasure. An enterprising young realtor taking a worthless hill side lot in trade had spent a miniature fortune bull-dozing off a level shelf on which a house might be built before Marcia had gotten out an injunction stopping him on the grounds that he was endangering the value of the Martin land and the safety of a deeded public road. The case was still in the local court. Meanwhile real danger existed. A flimsy barricade had been erected but anyone backing out of the Martin garage too fast might well overshoot the road and the narrow strip of land beyond which lay the thirty foot drop.

There was no certainty such a fall would kill a person. But Marcia would be dead before the car went over. He intended to see to that. The resulting blaze would destroy any evidence of foul play. Even outside of the Sayre and the insurance angle it would serve Marcia right for insisting on living in such a desolate spot. Because of her passion for solitude and gardening, when she wasn't running other folk's affairs, he had been forced to commute an hour each way, five days a week, for almost

fifteen years. Figuring two weeks vacation a year and five days off for national holidays left seven thousand, three hundred and fifty wasted hours. Martin had figured it out that noon.

AS THE train slowed for Wooded Hills, Glade knocked the dottle from his pipe and wanted to know if he and Marcia were going to the dance at the Woman's Club. Martin said he imagined they would as Marcia was on the entertainment committee, but as for himself he would much rather stay home and rest.

"Yeah. Me, too," Glade sighed. "But you know how women are."

Martin knew how one *would* be. Marcia would be dead within three hours. "*I wanted to drive but she insisted on driving,*" he would tell the local police. Knowing Marcia they would believe him. "*So while she backed the car out of the garage I waited to close the door. She backed part way out just fine but then she got confused or something and stepped on the gas instead of the brake and shot right on back and over the cut bank.*"

It would be as simple as that. The chances were the car would burst into flames on crashing. If not, it was only a normal reaction that he should scramble down a less steep portion of the bank to see if he could assist his wife. If the car hadn't caught on fire all he had to do was strike a match before shouting for help. He must remember to stop at the drug store and get matches.

His new pipe jutting prominently in front of his slightly receding chin, he followed Glade down the aisle and across the station platform to the waiting rank of wife-driven cars. The pipe was the first thing Marcia saw.

Rolling down the car window she wanted to know: "What in the name of time is that?"

"A pipe," Martin told her patiently. He could afford to be patient with her. Her death was going to balance his books and finance a fresh start in life with Sayre.

She raised her eyebrows but outside of an audible, "Hmm," made no further comment. Rounding the car to the other door, however, Martin heard Mrs. Glade in the next car whisper to her husband; "Two bits to that new dollar weeder that you want she doesn't let him smoke it in the house. Is it a bet?"

"Yes, dear," Glade said meekly. Then both of them laughed.

His teeth clenched on the stem of his dead pipe, Martin got in beside his wife and glanced anxiously at the gauge as she switched on the ignition. He had no reason to worry on that score. The tank was almost empty. Marcia was as methodical as she was practical. Unless they went for a drive over the weekend, Marcia always filled the tank on Friday and Wednesday evenings on the way home from the station. She said it simplified the book-keeping in her budget.

Meshing the car into gear she shot forward into the curb, said: "Damn that reverse gear!" and finding the proper niche shot back without warning, almost smashing into Harry Thorpe who drove one of the local taxis.

Smugly c o n t e n t, Martin looked straight ahead. He couldn't have staged it better. A dozen people had heard her. Thorpe would testify that she had almost added his right fender to his string. Outside of the station circle Marcia asked him what sort of a day he'd had, but before he could begin to tell her she began to enumerate her own activities.

The refrigerator had acted up again and she had called Swanson's and raised

hob. Either a gopher or a mole had gotten two of her best lily bulbs. She'd had to chase the Beckman dog twice. Mrs. Freeman had served creamed tuna on toast at the W.C.S.U. luncheon, and not very much of that.

Martin managed to interrupt her long enough to say he wanted to stop at the drug store. She parked at the curb but told him: "If it's razor blades you want, I got some this afternoon. And don't you dare buy any liquor to take to the dance tonight."

Martin said he wasn't interested in either razor blades or whiskey. Still suspicious she followed him into the store and he exploded mildly. "For heaven's sake, Marcia! Can't I even be trusted to buy a book of matches without your capable assistance?"

She sniffed that she doubted it very much and eyeing the pipe wanted to know how much of his allowance he had squandered on it. Doc Pierce was in the rear of the store putting up a prescription, but two high school girls sitting at the soda fountain heard the remark and snickered. Red-faced, Martin looked on the counters for matches. There were two small wicker baskets filled with paper books on the cigar counter next to a display of shaving lotion. He scooped a half dozen books from one, stuffed them into his pocket, laid a nickel and a penny on the glass and strode out of the store, looking neither to the right nor left.

On the walk Marcia made one of her rare apologies. "I'm sorry, Reece. I spoke before I thought. I didn't mean to embarrass you. But you know if I didn't watch the money we wouldn't have a dime."

There it was again, throwing his failure to make money up to him. Well, he would make money for Sayre. He'd have to. She was an expensive little tidbit but worth it. He glanced sideways at his wife. In the dim light from the dash board her face was old and hard. It was difficult to imagine ever having been in love with her.

Two blocks up the street she turned into the gas station drive and Martin noted with relief that the oldest Gleason boy was on duty. Marcia had had to warn him twice about forgetting to replace the screw cap after filling the gas tank.

"Ten," Marcia told the boy. "And be sure to check the water in the battery after you look at the oil."

Martin got out as if to stretch his legs. Perhaps the boy would forget a third time. He didn't. It was a simple matter, however to unscrew the cap and drop it on a pile of oily rags when the boy hung up the gas hose and moved to the front of the car. The last link in his chain of murder was complete. Now all that remained was to do it. He would kill Marcia, Martin decided, immediately when she'd backed out the car to go to the dance. If any blood was spilled it would have to be in the car and he would have to be careful not to get any of it on him. There was no danger of his being surprised in the act. They lived at the top of a dead end road with the nearest neighbor a block away and below them.

Enroute again Marcia wanted to know why, now he had pipe and tobacco and matches, he didn't smoke. Martin told her the truth. "I don't feel like smoking."

He didn't. Either the pipeful of tobacco he had smoked on the train or the thought of murder was making his stomach queasy. *Godalmighty! If anything should go wrong. This was murder he was planning . . .*

DINNER was a repetition of a thousand other meals. Marcia was a good cook; Martin would say that for her. She could make a little money go a long way. If she hadn't been a good manager, they wouldn't have their home clear—the home that was going to pull him out of his jam.

He wondered if Sayre could cook and dismissed it as unimportant. Girls like Sayre didn't need to know how to cook. They had other, more specialized, talents.

Across the table, Marcia talked on indeterminably. He said, "Yes, dear," and "no, dear," and grunted appreciatively in the proper places from a facility born of long habit. But his mind was miles away with Sayre. The private life of Walter Mitty, he thought wryly, was a kindergarten affair compared with the daydreaming he had done since that first night in Sayre's apartment.

Now all of it was going to come true. He would smother Sayre in luxury. It was a year between audits and once he had balanced his books he could always tap the till for a stake, perhaps hit a long shot or play the market. He realized Marcia had stopped talking and looked up at her.

Her eyes on his face were thoughtful. "You're in another jam of some kind, Reece. I can tell it by the way you're acting. What is it this time? Are you into the firm again? Or is it another woman?"

Both had happened before, but he told her not to be foolish.

"I'm not being foolish," she said. "I couldn't be and exist, not after living with you for fifteen years. You're not a bad man, Reece. You haven't a vicious bone in your body. But you're weak. You have a wishbone instead of a backbone. You need constant looking after."

He scoffed at the idea.

Marcia continued: "I know what I'm talking about. Maybe I haven't been the wife I might have been. But I've been the best one I knew how to be." A single tear trickled down one cheek. "It's difficult to be both a wife and a guardian, to be married to a weakling. Who is she, Reece? Some girl at the office? Some little snip of a thing who's told you that you are a 'dreat big handsome man'?"

Wadding his napkin into a ball, Martin threw it on the table and stood up. "I'll be damned if I'll listen to such nonsense." In his anger he was about to add that if she felt that way about him she could go to the Woman's Club dance alone, then realized he couldn't afford to be angry. Marcia *had* to back the car out of the garage tonight and he *had* to be with her. He was cutting it fine enough as it was. The audit was less than a month away and to make his dreams for Sayre come true his books *had* to balance.

He could almost wish, however, that Sayre's favorite term of endearment for him wasn't "you dreat big handsome man." It was uncanny how Marcia knew things.

"I'm going up and dress," he told her. "We'll talk this over later."

Alone in their room he leaned against the highboy, briefly, for support. Marcia had been right about a lot of things. But she wasn't right about Sayre. Sayre was the nicest thing that ever happened to a man. She was good and pure and sweet. She didn't know where the furs and ring and money that he had given her had come from. She had no way of knowing that after his years with the firm that his salary as head cashier was still less than five hundred a month, that the twenty thousand dollars he had spent on her were stolen.

He decided he needed a drink and was fumbling the lid off the flush bowl of the w. c. to retrieve his private bottle when Marcia entered the bedroom to dress.

"If you're looking for your bottle," she told him, "I put it on the shelf in your closet. It interfered with the plumbing where it was."

He took a long drink openly, and then a second. Marcia thought she was so damn smart. She thought she knew everything. Well, he knew one thing that she didn't.

Her only comment was: "You know what the doctor said. If your ulcers come back again, it's another six months on bread and milk."

A trifle lightheaded, he stripped off his clothes and showered. The two drinks had done him a world of good. He'd have another after he'd dressed if only in defiance. Sayre would never have mentioned his ulcers. She didn't even know he had them.

Clean socks, shorts, and under shirt were laid out on the bed beside a white dress shirt with the studs and cuff links already inserted. His dinner jacket freshly pressed was hanging in the closet. Marcia *did* take good care of him. He would miss her in a lot of ways.

Dressed, he took his bottle and went downstairs to wait. A weakling, was he, with a wishbone instead of a backbone? Well, if the dead knew anything, Marcia would soon knew differently.

HE MENTALLY reviewed his plans. They were very simple. That was where most killers made their mistake. They built an elaborate structure that toppled over on them. All he had to do was pick up the tire iron he had placed just inside the garage door, wait until Marcia had backed out, and hit her. Then, leaving the car in reverse he would merely pull out the throttle and step off the running board as it shot backwards over the cut bank. The odds were three to two that it would burst into flame. If not—

He slapped the pockets of his dinner jacket and cold sweat beading his forehead realized he had forgotten to transfer a book of matches from his top coat. He got two of the books from his top coat, put them in the side pocket of his dinner jacket, then realized he had been foolish to worry. He would be wearing his top coat. One match would be all he needed. With the cap off the gasoline tank, cascading gas would saturate the car. It should make a lovely blaze. And the beautiful part of it all would be that not even a finger of suspicion would be pointed at him.

He hadn't dug the cut bank. The real estate man had done that. Marcia insisted on driving. Marcia was an atrocious driver. Half of Wooded Hills would so testify. The Gleason boy had left off the gas cap twice before. The cap would be found at the station. The whole set-up was a natural. But it had taken a clever man to realize it.

Well pleased with Martin, Martin had a third drink and tossed the empty bottle into a waste basket. Marcia wouldn't complain because he hadn't carried it out to the trash can in the kitchen. Marcia would never complain about anything again.

A few minutes before nine she came down stairs looking exactly what she was—a stout housewife in a last year's evening gown that didn't quite seem to fit her. Her face was flushed with the effort of dressing and an untidy wisp or two had already escaped her hairdo.

"If you're thinking of driving," she told him, "get it out of your mind. We have other things to do with our money

than pay drunken driving fines. Besides, Judge Howard warned you you'd go to jail next time."

Martin was glad she had brought it up. It gave him more reason to hate her. Sayre thought he was cute when he was drinking. Of course she'd never seen him really drunk. He didn't intend she should. Life with Sayre was going to be beautiful. "I have no intention of driving," he told Marcia.

"See you remember that," she said as she struggled unaided into her coat and tied a scarf over her hair. "And another thing. If Bill Hanson or Jack Maddox or any of that younger crowd start a crap game in the back room, you stay out of it."

"Yes, dear," Martin said meekly, he hoped for the last time.

A light, cold rain had begun to fall. It felt good on Martin's flushed cheeks. Reaching the garage he opened the overhead door. Marcia slipped back of the wheel and mindful of the wet pavement and the cut bank eased the car out slowly. Picking up the tire iron, Martin walked out to the braked car, opened the door and stood a moment looking at his wife, nerving himself for the act.

"What now?" she asked, irritated, then saw the tire iron in his hand and knew. He expected her to scream. She didn't. A moment of silence followed broken only by the pit-pat of the rain on the metal roof of the car. When she did speak it was quietly, as a mother might speak to a wilful child. "No, Reece. Don't. For your own sake, please don't. You can't get away with it. You can't get away with murder. Don't try it for the sake of some little tramp. Besides, my insurance isn't worth it. I knew there was something wrong. I could feel it. Let's go back in the house and talk this out."

"There is nothing to talk out," he told her and brought the iron down on her head. It was easier to do than he had thought that it would be. He struck her again and again, then realized she was dead. All that remained to be done was back the car over the cut bank.

It proved to be harder to do than murder. A man could head a car toward a cliff and then step off of the running board at the last moment. But backing one off was another matter. The car door interfered for one thing. If he stayed on the running board long enough for the car to gather sufficient momentum the door would sweep him over with the car. If he closed the door there was no running board on which to stand.

TEN minutes later, fear sweat beading his forehead, he managed to wedge one of Marcia's feet against the clutch, then, closing the door, reach in through the open window, shift the car into reverse, and open the throttle. It remained stationary for a moment—then, as the dead foot slipped off the clutch, leaped back in a sickening series of jerks. Even then the car caught on the edge of the bank and teetered precariously, its headlights sweeping the sky. He was forced to heave up on the front bumper to give it the added impetus it needed to fall the thirty feet to the shelf.

It landed with a shriek of protesting metal, rolled over twice and came to a rest on its side. He waited, panting, for it to burst into flames. When it didn't, he was forced to scramble down a less steep portion of the cut bank and race through the mud of the shelf toward the car. It *had* to catch on fire. It *had* to. The marks of the tire iron had to be consumed by flame. And he hadn't too much time. Other ears than his had

heard the crash. Other eyes had seen the headlights sweep the sky.

The reek of gasoline was strong. That much of his plan at least had worked. Marcia lay back of the wheel pinned in the wreckage. In the faint light from the dash board she might have been asleep except for the ribbon of blood that covered one side of her face.

Drying his hands on his coat, Martin fumbled one of the paper books of matches from his pocket, tore off a match and struck it. There was no resulting flame. He tried another match, and then another one. The matches failed to light.

In panic of fear now he threw the book away and fumbled in the pocket of his dinner jacket for one of the books he had put in there. The matches in his top coat pocket were wet. They had to be.

The fresh book proved no better than the first. There wasn't even a resulting scratch. The matches felt waxy to his fingers. In minutes, seconds now, the first of the neighbors would arrive. Desperate, he held the book of matches in front of one of the twisted headlights, then grew strangely calm as his own words returned to haunt him—*"For heaven's sake, Marcia. Can't I even be trusted to buy a book of matches without your capable assistance?"*

Marcia had sniffed she doubted it very much and it would seem that she was right. She was undoubtedly right about a good many things, including Sayre. Sayre had to know where he had gotten the money that he had spent on her. No woman could be that dumb. And he wasn't big or handsome. He was merely a pudgy little man nudging fifty, with a wishbone instead of a backbone. Suddenly very lonely he walked back and squatted in the mud beside the dead woman in the car.

"I'm sorry, Marcia," he told her.

He was. He was sorry for a lot of things, too late. Someone was standing on top the cut bank now shouting down at him but he paid no attention.

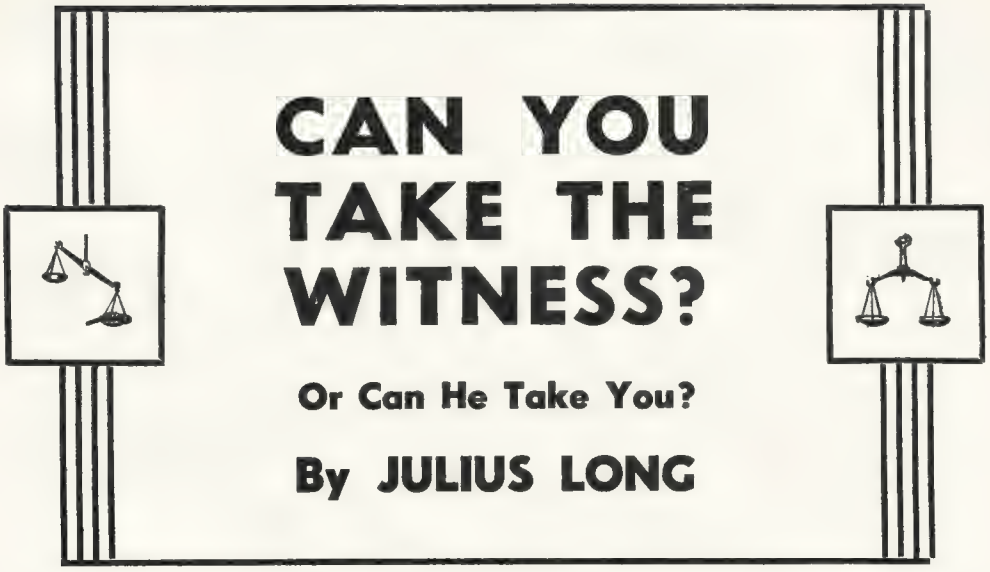
This was murder. It was useless to try to pretend that it was anything else. Now that it had failed he could see a lot of holes in his plans. The pulled-out throttle had been bent into that position by the crash. The tire iron still lay on the road where the first police car would find it. If further proof of premeditation was necessary, his fingerprints would be found on the gas cap superimposed over those of the Gleason boy. A glance at his books would reveal the shortage. The other girls in the office would be pleased to tell about Sayre. And then there was Marcia's insurance, made payable, of course, to him.

Feet sloshed through the mud behind him. Friendly hands lifted him up. "We saw the lights flash across the sky," Glade panted. "Then we heard the crash. What happened, Reece? Did Marcia back out of the garage too fast?"

Martin spoke like a man in a dream. "No, Marcia backed out just fine." He absently took one of the paper books from his pocket, tore off one of the paper sticks and started to scratch it on the folder.

Glade snatched it from his hand. "Are you crazy, Reece? With all that spilled gasoline a match could blow us to hell."

"They aren't matches," Martin told him plaintively. "They look like book matches but they aren't. They are a clever advertising gag. You see they are really individual styptic sticks." He held a book in front of one of the headlights. "See? It says so right there. 'CHEX-IT Styptic Sticks Stop Bleeding Of Small Cuts and Scratches—Convenient to Use —16 sticks—Five Cents.' "



CAN YOU TAKE THE WITNESS?

Or Can He Take You?

By JULIUS LONG

1

The classification of crimes as *mala in se* or *mala prohibita* is almost obsolete, yet we still view all crimes as falling into such two classes. Are such crimes, respectively, crimes which are immoral but not prohibited by law, as distinguished from crimes which are prohibited?

2

You are defense attorney for Wilbur Wrinkle, charged with violating a municipal ordinance against driving a motor vehicle without an exhaust muffler. You move the court to dismiss the case against Wilbur because the local ordinance under which he is charged states no crime at all.

You say: "Your Honor, this ordinance reads as follows:

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Now your clever argument is that this ordinance does not specifically state that the operation of a motor vehicle as stated is a *crime*. The ordinance merely says that whoever operates such vehicle shall be fined not more than fifty dollars. Therefore your client Wilbur has violated no law and committed no crime.

Will the police judge (mayor or justice of the peace) sustain your motion and dismiss the case against Wilbur?

3

The term, *crimen falsi* is literally translated as the crime of falsifying. However, it is also applied to that class of crimes which disqualify a person from testifying. In most modern jurisdictions, a witness is not disqualified by previous conviction of crime, though such conviction may be used to impeach, that is, discredit him. Before a cross-examining attorney will question an adverse witness with a view to bringing to light a former conviction of crime, he should look well into the man's past and make sure that his question will not boomerang. If you were a cross-examining counsel, about which of the following convictions of crime would you cross-examine an adverse witness?

1) Petty larceny at the age of fourteen.
2) Jay-walking.
3) Forgery.
4) Embezzlement.
5) Reckless driving.

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4

The crime of larceny is divided by statute into two classes, petty larceny and grand larceny. A thief steals a truck tire from a service station and is apprehended. You are the district attorney. You find that the retail value of the truck tire is $55.00 and that the wholesale value, that is, the price which the filling station man paid for the tire, is $34.00.

The law of your state classifies grand larceny as any larceny involving the theft of property valued at $35.00 or more; petty larceny as that involving property of a lower value. Which charge is proper in this truck tire case: petty or grand larceny?

Answers to Preceding Questions

1

No, the distinction between crimes *mala in se* and *mala prohibita* is a distinction between crimes regarded to be immoral in themselves and crimes which exist merely because man-made laws have made them so.

A crime which is not prohibited by law is a violation of terms; however immoral an act may seem, it is not a crime unless the law provides a penalty for the act.

As to what crimes are *mala in se*, we find that the time and place affects our classification. Though such crimes as treason, arson, murder and larceny are still considered *mala in se*, we note a change with the passage of time. A great many people once considered the sale and imbibing of intoxicating liquors a crime *mala in se;* the majority opinion now regards the Volstead Act as a significant example of the law making an act a crime merely because it prohibited the act.

Buying gasoline without having the proper ration stamps is no longer a crime though it was once *mala prohibita*. What constitutes a crime and the degree thereof is almost as variable as the style of women's hats.

2

Nope. Wilbur is hooked. A statute or ordinance making the commission or omission of some act a crime does not have to state in so many words that the commission or omission is a crime. All that is necessary is to provide for a penalty for that commission or omission. There can be no crime without a penalty; a statute or ordinance which states an act to be a crime is futile unless there be a penalty. There have been many cases where state legislators and municipal counsels have passed laws making something a crime but neglecting to provide a penalty. When this happens there are red faces, but no convictions upon the laws passed.

3

You would be foolish to bring up a conviction for petty larceny at the age of fourteen, jay-walking or reckless driving. A jury would be prejudiced against you for so doing. There is a classic story of a Simon Legree type district attorney who attempted to discredit a prominent business man by bringing out a past conviction of crime. The man burst into tears and admitted that when a small boy he had broken into a store with some other youngsters and stolen some candy. The jury's reaction was such that they believed everything the witness said, far from disbelieving him as the D.A. had hoped. Of course, conviction of forgery and embezzlement tend to impeach a witness and throw a shadow upon his credibility.

4

Grand larceny is the proper charge. Though the wholesale value of the truck tire is less than $35.00, the retail value is more, and it is the retail value which is used. This is a sad circumstance for the thief, for petty larceny is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine and small jail sentence while grand larceny calls for at least a year's imprisonment.

THE END

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(Continued from page 91)

second premise was that Longstreet deliberately got himself jailed.

"Combining these two facts, you immediately get some inevitable conclusions. First, Longstreet knew someone was after him, and the forces involved were too much for him to fight. So he chose jail as the only safe place to be. Second, he had been framed for Carmichael's murder. Luckily for Longstreet, his being in jail not only made him temporarily safe, but gave him an iron-clad alibi and upset the framer's applecart.

"The third inescapable conclusion is that the testimony of Marie Kincaid was a lie from beginning to end. There never were any phone calls. Her story was prepared in advance of the crime. If I hadn't, out of pure cussedness, pointed out a gunman named Anton Strowlski to a cop, which prevented him from phoning Marie and telling her the plot had gone sour, she never would have told the story she did. And after finally learning too late that Longstreet had been safely in jail all the time, she tried to wriggle out of her sworn statement by inventing another story which never happened.

"And the last obvious conclusion is that from the moment Longstreet learned Carmichael had been murdered, he was able to figure out exactly what had happened."

Marden Swope was gazing at me in wide-eyed amazement. Longstreet's face, directed at his partner, contained an expression of unholy glee. Warren Day had half risen, and glared at Longstreet.

"If you knew the answer all along," he rapped, "why'd you keep quiet?"

"That's the silly part of the whole affair," I answered for Longstreet. "He has a sacred locket he takes oaths on.

Before Mrs. Swope warned him he was on the spot, she made him swear on the locket that he'd never repeat a word. That left him in the peculiar position of being framed for a murder and unable to say anything in his own defense. He was literally between the devil and the deep blue sea. So he hired me to expose what he already knew."

Day said: "He chose the devil," guffawed ferociously and suddenly stopped when no one else smiled.

Ignoring the inspector, I went on: "In a desperate effort to keep his oath, he gave me twenty-four hours to solve the case. If I hadn't made it, I suspect he would have talked anyway. Keeping the oath was worth ten thousand dollars to him, but I doubt that he wanted to gamble his life on it." I looked at Longstreet. "Right?"

He merely grinned without answering.

Swope, suddenly coming to life, rose from his chair. "What was that about my wife?" he demanded.

I said: "Shut up and sit down."

He looked at me whitely, his eyes narrowed to slits. Hannegan crossed the room, put his hand on Swope's chest and pushed him back in his chair.

Warren Day snarled at me: "If you're through grandstanding now, spill the works. Is this guy the killer?"

I took him out of his misery. "No. It was a good old-fashioned gang killing. Swope ordered it and Marie Kincaid was an accessory. If Longstreet had received the warning earlier, he'd probably have skipped town. But when he got it, Anton Strowlski was already on his tail. And when he couldn't shake Anton, he got himself arrested.

"What gave me the first steer was that even after his alibi was established, Longstreet insisted on staying in jail until the case was solved. The only reason I

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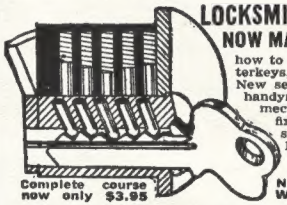

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CAT-TEX

SOLE OUT-WEARS LEATHER!

could see for that was that he was afraid of something, and I learned what he was afraid of by a visit to the Rex Amusement Corporation and a conversation with a bartender. The corporation's salesmen are the finest bunch of professional extortionists and killers you ever saw. They've spread coin machines all over town by delivering them and telling proprietors to keep them. You can pass that to the rackets squad.

"So it was all of them Longstreet was afraid of. He'd been put on the spot in typical gangster fashion. Swope here was tired of splitting three ways, so he had Carmichael killed and framed Longstreet. Howard Tattersall, who had access to Longstreet's room, obtained the gun, probably on Swope's promise that he'd be made a partner. But Swope wasn't splitting with anyone. After Tattersall served his purpose, he conveniently committed suicide.

"Swope picked a time he knew Longstreet would be at his river camp alone and without an alibi. Undoubtedly one of Swope's killers was waiting at the camp to arrange Longstreet's suicide in remorse for having slain his partner.

"Marie was merely a tool. She's probably Swope's mistress."

Swope said: "I want a lawyer."

Paying no attention to him, Warren Day said: "So after all this circus, we still don't know the name of the actual killer. I'm going to find out right now!"

It turned out to be Tiny Sartt. The state rewarded him with a free trip to another world. Swope got life, Marie five years, Longstreet my apology and permission to call me "Moon," and I got ten thousand dollars for eleven hours work, which is nine thousand, nine hundred and seventy-five more than my standard day rate.

THE END

TOP (L. TO R.): PETE REISER, BRUCE EDWARDS, EDDIE MIKSIS
BOTTOM (L. TO R.): RALPH BRANCA, DUKE SNIDER, CLYDE KING

WILL THE ARGOSY-DODGER CONTEST UNCOVER STARS LIKE THESE?

A Chance To Scout Yourself! Are you a baseball player with ambitions to play professional baseball? Then, here is the most amazing contest ever held.

Through an extraordinary arrangement with the Brooklyn Dodgers, ARGOSY magazine offers its readers and their baseball-playing friends the opportunity of proving their ability to one of the most talented group of player scouts in organized baseball.

If you are eligible to play professional baseball, merely fill out the application blank in the April Argosy, giving your baseball record. If the facts and figures you submit pass the joint Argosy-Dodger board of judges, your application will be turned over to the Dodger scouting system and you will hear directly from them.

A Dodger Contract To The Winner! Here's what the Argosy-Dodger contest means to the successful applicants. The *outstanding recruit* will receive: An expense-paid ten-day road trip with the Dodgers in a Dodger uniform; an invitation to be a guest of the Dodgers at the 1948 World Series and *A Player Contract With the Dodger Organization.*

Twenty other recruits will be invited to a special training school operated by the Dodgers, with all expenses paid.

Fans, Fathers, Coaches! You're in this contest too. Because if you are related to or know of a prospective young ball player, you can tell the Argosy board all about him. The coach and/or sand lot manager of the outstanding recruit will also get the expense-paid road trip and World Series invitation along with the prize-winning rookie.

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